

BIBLE LESSONS ON GENESIS



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Bible Lessons for Schools

GENESIS

BY

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K V G

PREFACE.

THE following outline lessons on Genesis form part of a series originally drawn up for the use of my own Class and of the members of my Staff who might wish to avail themselves of them. They have been lent at various times to teachers in other schools, but as further requests have been made for them, it has been thought advisable to publish the notes on Genesis, in order that they may be available either as a text-book for students or as a book of outline lessons for teachers.

Each lesson contains the story of one or more chapters of Genesis, together with the moral and spiritual truths most clearly to be deduced from them.

When used by teachers, these outline lessons will naturally be supplemented by wide reading, and adapted to the age and general intelligence of the class under instruction. In advanced Sixth Form or Bible Class work it would be advisable to make additions, and to take up points which are omitted in these outlines, either because they are too difficult for the average scholar, or because they were not generally applicable. For a boys' school there are one or two lessons which could with advantage be added, but they have not been given here because for a girls' school and for younger children they were not so necessary.

For Junior work, the lessons should be simplified. Illustrations should be added, and only the clearest and

most evident applications of the story should be selected. As far as practical illustrations are concerned, I have thought it best to give them rarely, and then chiefly from other parts of the Bible. This I have done deliberately, because I have found that those illustrations which come spontaneously from personal experience and reading are those which appeal most to the pupil.

As mentioned above, the book is intended for the use of teachers and as a text-book for students. A practical difficulty which I have met is that no general text-book is available for Scripture teaching in Secondary Schools. In consequence, pupils must depend upon the notes taken in the class. A suitable text-book would both economize time and ensure greater accuracy, and, in addition, would leave the pupil free to take down any additional notes from the oral instruction.

The book has, therefore, a dual purpose, and as such is subject to certain limitations. The lessons are written practically as they might be given to a class. Certain points are omitted which, if the book had been written for teachers only, would have rendered it of additional value. Thus, in the application of the lessons, those practical problems which come into the daily life of the pupil have been emphasized rather than those of later years and experience.

With such an end in view all critical questions are avoided. The text is taken as it stands, and the attention of the students is drawn solely to the lesson it teaches in regard to their duty to God and to their fellow-men.

A conservative teacher will, in any case, approve of this line. But those who hold broader views may also see good reason for taking it. The attention of the pupils is

not drawn away from questions bearing directly upon daily life to others which only mature thought and adequate reading could qualify them to consider. Each teacher must decide how far it is necessary or desirable to draw the attention of pupils to critical questions of authorship and text. But, whatever decision may be reached on this point, there is no question that the great aim of conservatives as well as of liberals should be to illuminate the facts of Scripture, and make clear the broad lines of personal application. What is important to emphasize is the general attitude likely to be most helpful in the daily study and use of the Bible, and to try to produce the spirit of a learner rather than that of a critic or a judge.

Apart from doctrinal and critical question, Scriptural teaching in Secondary as well as in Primary schools offers difficult problems. The distinguishing feature of present-day education is the increase of specialization. In a good school each Master or Mistress teaches only his own subject, or those most nearly allied to it. The advantage of this system is that he teaches with power, because he has a thorough mastery of his subject. For instance, if he is a specialist in Mathematics, he has probably been marked out at school and at the University for his excellence in this subject. He has mastered the best way of presenting it to his pupils. He is interested in the lesson which he is giving, and knows how to arouse attention.

In the teaching of Scripture there is at present little or no specialization. It is thought, and thought rightly, that as a general rule the Scripture lesson should be given by the teacher to the pupils in his own Form. He understands their difficulty and has sympathy with

them, while they also know him intimately, and his words on the great questions of life should carry peculiar weight, for he is the natural priest and leader of his pupils. Ideally, to no other should the lesson be entrusted. But often he has not sufficient Bible knowledge or mastery of theological subjects to enable him to give a Scripture lesson with the same strength and insight that the pupils find in his mathematical instructions. The more conscientious the master, the more, if inadequately equipped, he shrinks from his task. He knows that he is touching the most difficult and the most responsible of all subjects, and that he is forming the character of his pupils.

The aim of this book has been to furnish him some help in his task. It is hoped that it will be found to contain a moderate and generally accepted interpretation of the chief moral and spiritual applications of the lessons in Genesis with which it deals. It does not deal with problems that belong more properly to the studies of specialists.

Owing to the fact that the book is intended not only for the use of teachers, but also as a text-book for pupils, an exclusive list of authorities would be confusing and out of place. Of the many that have been used, the following will be found the simplest and most helpful to those who wish to read further on the subject: Alexander Maclaren's *Exposition of Holy Scripture*, *The Expositor's Bible*, Hasting's *Bible Dictionary*, Edersheim's *The World before the Flood*, Robertson's *Notes on Genesis*, and Peloubet's *International Lessons for Sunday Schools*.

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HAVERGAL COLLEGE,
TORONTO, March 13th, 1907.

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LESSON I.

GENESIS I.—II. 4.

“HE SPAKE AND IT WAS DONE.”

The Name Genesis.

The Jews called this book “Bereshith,” in the beginning; the Greeks called it “Genesis,” the origin—and by this latter name it is known to us.

The Jews have always ascribed the authorship of this book to Moses, and although recent critics have disputed this point there seems to be no good reason for not accepting the historic belief of the Jews and that of the Christian Church that Moses by Divine inspiration wrote this history of “the beginning.” In writing a first history of the world he would doubtless, under the guidance and illumination of the Holy Spirit, avail himself of the traditions and learning of his day. The story of Genesis becomes clearer when we think of Moses and of the Israelites, for whom, in the first instance, it was written. Moses was himself an Israelite, a poet and a scholar, brought up in the court of Pharaoh and educated in all the learning of Egypt. As a student and as a courtier in Egypt he saw that men worshipped the beauty and wonder of the works of creation, the sun, the stars, the rocks, and living creatures. Moses could not join in this worship, for he had been taught in his home about the God of the Israelites, and in consequence looked further than the Egyptians, and saw beyond things created the great Creator. Moses had gone up into the Mount, into the

very presence of God, and it is into this presence that he strives to lift the Israelites and all those for whom in the ages to come the Book was written. He leads them past the idolatry and superstition to God Himself, past the manifestation of power to the very source of Power. "In the beginning God created the Heaven and the earth," or, as he says in the Ninetieth Psalm, "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God." This last verse goes back even further than the former one, and is like the opening words of the Gospel of St. John, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

The Israelites had been exposed to the idolatry of Egypt, and they were about to be exposed to the even darker idolatry of Canaan. Hence the Book of Genesis opens with no uncertain sound, "In the beginning God," "God said," and "it was done," "The Lord God made the earth and the Heavens."

In the Beginning—God.

Gen. i., v. 1. This opening verse is full of grandeur, of mystery, and of majesty. It strikes the key of the strain which is afterwards sustained throughout the Bible. It is the inspired revelation of the living Personality whom we know as God. It tells of the First Cause of the vast universe of the Heavens, as well as of the earth, and of all that is therein. The whole Bible is the story of God's revelation of Himself to man; a revelation given at first dimly, because of man's inability to receive it, but later, as on Mount Sinai, with an increasing brightness, until, at the birth of Christ, it broke forth into a light which was and is to shine more and more unto the perfect day, when the "Lord God shall give them light," and "they shall see His face."

God, the One Inspirer and Creator of the Universe.

"God created the Heaven and the earth." How grandly this rings out in contrast with the uncertain and fragmentary

teaching which has come down to us from other nations. How strangely must it have sounded to the Israelites who had been brought up amidst the idolatry of Egypt! The Egyptians had seen the various forces of nature at work, and had attributed to them powers of good or of evil. They worshipped these forces in order that they might secure the blessing which they desired, or avert the trouble which they dreaded. But this opening verse at once lifts every eye from the creature to the Creator. The whole conception of God, as God and as Creator, is as far beyond human imagination as the Heavens are above the earth, but when once conceived it brings understanding and satisfaction to both soul and spirit. We see everywhere, in the Heavens and in the earth, one purpose, one conception, one marvellous forethought and intention, one scheme of love, one Master mind full of a beneficence, wisdom and majesty, inconceivable were it not thus revealed. "The Heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth His handiwork." "How excellent is Thy name in all the earth." Science, in its gradual progression towards truth, spells out, follows and elucidates, the revelation of God as Creator of all.

The Earth—Chaos and Void.

We turn our eyes from the glory of God to the earth as first created by God, without form, void, dark, chaos; a fit emblem of the contrast between God, who is light, and man, who is darkness when left to himself and without the illuminating power of God. But upon the earth, even in this state of darkness, as later upon man, there moved the Spirit of God.

The Revelation of the Creation.

We cannot tell of what era of the creation these opening verses of Genesis speak. The revelation is given according to the limited power of man's understanding. It is given so clearly that the simplest child learns that his Father's hand of love has created everything and that it is very good. It is given so wonderfully that the advanced Christian can join

in the great song of praise to God, because "God in the beginning has laid the foundation of the earth, and the Heavens are the work of His hands" (Heb. i. 10).

The Gradual Progress of the Creation.

Into this dark, formless chaos came order, life and light. Each stage is divided into periods called evening and morning (2 Peter iii. 8). Each stage is brought about by the Word of the Lord; that still calm voice which has spoken all down the ages. Each stage is a revelation of the goodness and love of God, for as each command of order, light and love comes into the world it changes the future home of man into a place which is not only fit, but also exquisitely prepared for him. Each gift as it came from the Father of lights passed under His all-seeing eye, and was pronounced by Him to be very good. As we think of the light and of its gradual progress across the brooding darkness, we remember that spiritual light is in like manner by the same will of God passing across the spiritual darkness. The command, "Let there be light," has gone forth as surely in the spiritual world as in the natural world, although to us the Sun of Righteousness may seem to arise but slowly with healing in His wings. At the next stage of the Creation, as the word of God goes forth, the firmament, like some vast canopy, is lifted above the earth. The sea is given bounds which it may not pass. Vegetable life is created; mists and vapours are removed in order that the sun and moon may appear; the great laws which govern the astronomical world are decreed. These are the laws which men formulate and call science; these laws remain unchanged, and without need of change, for "God rested from His work," and "behold it was very good."

The Creation of Higher Life.

After this follows the creation of conscious life in the air, in the sea, and, at a later period, upon the earth. This conscious life is especially owned and blessed by God. Before man is given dominion over this higher life, with the

power of inflicting either blessing or suffering upon it, God takes it as His own, pronounces it to be very good ; it is His own, and He blesses it.

The Creation of Man.

Here we seem to cross a great gulf. There is an immeasurable distance between the highest animal creation and man created in the image of God, for he is endowed, no matter in how limited a degree, with something of the character of the divine attributes. Just as in a dew-drop that sparkles in the sunlight we see reflected something of the character and glory of the sun, so a soul is endowed with a spirit capable of knowing God and of holding spiritual communion with him ; with conscious purpose, memory, passions and power of self-government—a free and responsible being.

God entrusts to man the whole of the living creation so that it may be subject to him, and may minister to his wants. God does not at this period reveal to man why he is so singularly blessed and provided for, nor what is the ultimate purpose that He has in view for him in the hereafter.

Lastly, God completes His creation of the world by the ordinance of the Seventh Day. God had given great gifts to man during the six preceding epochs, but in this last epoch He lifts the whole earth, as it were, back again to Himself, and ordains an epoch of blessing and sanctification. In the beginning, God, and, on the seventh day, God's work ended ; man, made in God's image, is called to follow His example, to work and then to rest, and receive the spiritual blessing of sanctification.

The Overrule of God. The Contrast between the Christian and the Fatalist.

The world of the Christian differs from the world of the fatalist, the Christian finds the presence of God everywhere, even in the time of chaos he knows that all creation comes from God, is touched by His hand. The Christian turns not to a fate that works on unmindful of him and crushes

him, but to a living Personality who knows, has made, understands, and loves him.

The Fatherhood of God.

The whole aspect of life changes as we recognize the handiwork of God. We are touched with love and with affection, because it is our Father's work which we see around us ; we trace in it the beauty of His thought, His loving care for us, and His wisdom ; above all we see in our fellow creatures, however distorted by sin, traces of His handiwork and of His attributes. Into them has been breathed the breath of life. Life becomes sacred. It comes from God ; it is in the hand of God ; it should depart only at the will of God.

LESSON II.

GENESIS II. AND III.

THE ADVENT OF SIN.

Man's Hidden Nature Revealed.

The first chapter of Genesis gives what has been called "the Vision of Creation;" the second and third chapters reveal man and the hidden forces at work within him. Each man as he reads these chapters can find in the history of Adam and Eve the history of his own life.

The Twofold Nature of Man.

The first chapter told of the creation of man in relation to the universe; the second tells of man in relation to the spiritual and natural world around him.

We find first the two-fold nature of man. He is formed from the dust of the ground, but breathed into by the living God—the dust of the ground, with its instincts of acquisition, of self-preservation, and of self-love; the breath of life with its spiritual possibilities, its spiritual aspirations. "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

The Cradle of the Human Race.

Men have given much time and thought to endeavouring to ascertain where the Garden of Eden was, and state the following reasons for thinking that the plateau of Armenia is indicated as the cradle of the human race. It is surrounded by high mountain ranges. In it the rivers

Euphrates and the Tigris (called an arrow from the swiftness of its course) take their origin. There are two other large rivers which rise there, the Ker and the Araxes, and some have thought that these are the Pison and the Gihon. They tell us that bdellium, a wax-like substance, valued for its fragrance and medicinal properties, is best found in Arabia; and Pliny says that the onyx, which was much valued by the ancients, is also best found in Arabia and India. They say further that it is the only place in which wheat is indigenous; so that they think that the various streams of humanity had their source in the East, and thence flowed in innumerable branches over the whole earth.

The Threefold Gifts of Work, Law and Marriage.

Work.—In order to complete man's happiness three primal laws were given. The first was work; this was embittered later in consequence of man's sin, but is still his greatest blessing, whether he recognizes it as such or not. We find this to be true, for whenever man evades work, and seeks pleasure only, his whole nature becomes impoverished, and deprived of the stability of earnest purpose and responsibility which ought to be his birthright.

Law.—The gift of law, even in its rudimentary stages, "thou shalt not," is the second great blessing to man. The moral law, putting man into the right relationship between good and evil, is as necessary as the great laws of the physical world are to the universe. Further, with the revelation of that law was given also the penalty of transgression. "In the day that thou eatest thereof, dying thou shalt die." "The wages of sin is death."

Marriage.—Before the institution of marriage, the true relation of woman to man is defined. She is to be the comrade and the help-meet of man, not an idler, a playmate, or a drudge. The position thus assigned to her is full of beauty and dignity. It is true that after the Fall, just as work was embittered, just as law and order were changed from more or less unconscious obedience to a grudging

consent or a wilful rebellion, so, too, woman's place of honour and dignity was changed, and bitterness and humiliation cast upon her. The only nation in which she seems to have at all retained her rightful position or happiness was among the Jews; that is to say, the nation in which some knowledge of God and of obedience to His laws still remained. It was not until Christ came and gave honour to woman, and recognized fully her service and her ministry, that she became in any true sense once again the comrade and the help meet of man.

The ordinance of marriage was the third gift. This ordinance was in like manner confirmed and blessed by Christ at the opening of His ministry, and His first miracle was at a marriage feast. By His teaching and blessing He restored both woman and marriage to the place which God had first marked out for them.

Untried Innocence.

We find Adam and Eve in the garden, innocent, but with an untried innocence. They have also a rudimentary conception of law. "Thou shalt not."

The supreme question at issue is whether the higher or lower nature shall prevail; whether the thought of God or the thought of self shall be first. Untried innocence in itself is of little value. It is "the result of circumstances and not of character." Man can reach the highest stage only when he stands firm in the day of testing. We recognize how much higher tested obedience is than untested. The beauty reflected in the face of an aged saint of God is far greater than the beauty in the face of an innocent child, for it tells of the victory of the spirit of God over the lower nature, the name of God written upon the forehead. How far transcending both must have been the beauty of Christ! His was a beauty that shone forth with an innocence greater even than that of a child, for a child has sinned, whereas Christ was free from sin and has won a victory over temptation more complete than that of the greatest saint who ever lived. "Tempted like as we are, yet without sin."

The Temptation.

Man, with full earthly happiness and unbroken communion with God, is given the opportunity of proving his conscious obedience to God. This opportunity comes through the approach of the tempter.

The Question of Sin.

How sin came into the world, why it is there, what is its purpose in the creation, we do not know. We only know it in our own experience and in what we see around us. We know that it is subtle and insidious, coming like a serpent to-day as of old to our first parents; stealing in unseen, glittering as it exercises its fascinating influence, as it wreathes its coils around us.

The Way in which Sin Works.

1. Questioning whether God really has forbidden the thing or not (iii. 1).

2. Questioning whether the penalty really will fall or not (iii. 4).

3. Questioning whether the advantage to be gained does not make it worth our while to run the risk (iii. 6).

4. Questioning whether after all we have not the right to do as we choose.

5. By listening to suggestions of evil. By playing with the thoughts of sin.

6. By the sin of covetousness. Eve had all she needed, but she fixed her desire on what was not given to her by God. What we desire we strive after. What we fix our eyes and our thoughts upon in course of time becomes the goal towards which we work. Therefore, "Whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely . . . think on these things." "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness."

The Consequences of Sin.

1. *Eve did not sin alone.*—There is a great and terrible law in sin, and that law is that we do not sin alone. If we do not, like Eve, actually draw another into our sin, yet by

our unconscious influence we weaken the resistance to sin in others because our soul has been drawn towards sin. We no longer instinctively shrink from it, and we lower our own spiritual standard, as well as that of others with whom we come in contact.

2. *Suffering entailed.*—Those nearest us, those whom we love best, not only suffer a loss of moral strength through our sin, but they also share the punishment which inevitably follows. In this case Adam sinned as well as Eve, but whether he had done so or not, the consequences of Eve's transgression fell in measure upon him. The saddest part of our sin is that however much we may wish to we cannot bear its weight alone. Its shadow falls on those nearest to us, and on those whom we love best.

3. *The Separation from God.*—The effect of sin on the relationship between our souls and God is marvellously portrayed here. It is not that God withdrew from Adam and Eve, but that Adam, with the cloud of sin upon him, could not approach God as before. He said himself that shame was born within him. He had yielded to his lower nature, and in consequence his lower nature had taken the pre-eminence. His impulse was to hide from God, to get rid of thoughts of Him, "He that sinneth walketh in darkness."

4. *Selfishness.*—Sin ever leads to more sin, to hard thoughts of God, to hard thoughts of man, and to intense selfishness. Adam first throws the blame upon God, "the woman whom *Thou* gavest," then upon Eve. His one thought is to shield himself at all costs.

The Blight upon the Garden of Eden.

A definite punishment now falls upon tempter and tempted alike. The punishment of the serpent is connected with the mystery of evil in the world. Evil, as it is in its essence, can never turn to good, and, therefore it is to be perpetually at war with humanity until its power is crushed. Sin will make a culminating effort, "will bruise his heel," will dare to crucify the Son of God, but in that effort will receive its death blow. "Thou shalt bruise his head."

From that time forth, as far as man is concerned, "dying it shall die." "Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory' . . . "Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

To Adam came the embitterment of God's great gift of work, and the passing of the sentence of death upon his body, the drawing of his whole nature towards the earth out of which he was taken ; to Eve, the passing of pain and trouble across the great joy of her motherhood, and further, the diminution of her power. She had used her power to lead her husband to sin, and therefore she was to be subject to her husband, and he was to rule over her.

Lastly came the natural consequences of their sin—the loss of the immediate presence of God. This loss came not only upon themselves, but fell upon their descendants also.

The Final Victory.

We see everywhere that God's work which He at first pronounced to be good in man and in creation was withered by the poisoned breath of sin. But God's promise to Eve was fulfilled. The power of sin was broken by the death of Christ upon the Cross, and, from that time, the power of a new life passed with freshening influence over the souls of men. The quickening breath of Him who had won the redemption came, and still comes, in Pentecostal blessing, and wherever it passes, it revives souls withered by sin, and a new hatred of sin, and strength to withstand it, is born within them. Men are drawn back into the presence of God, and once more have the longing for purity, the hunger and thirst after righteousness, and the shrinking from whatever will hinder the spiritual communion of their souls with God.

LESSON III.

GENESIS IV.

THE MARK OF SIN.

IN the last lesson there was the first settling down of the cloud of sin upon the earth, bringing with it the separation of man from God. This next lesson shows the settling down of another cloud of sin, bringing with it the separation of man from man, as well as of man from God.

Adam and Eve sinned, and punishment fell upon them. They were dreary, desolate and disheartened, but at least they shared their punishment together. In this lesson we find that sin works further. It separates not only man from God, but also man from man.

Yet in each case there is a ray of hope. In the separation from God there is the promised bruising of the serpent's head, the final destruction of sin, and consequent re-union with God. In the case of Cain and Abel there is also a ray of hope. Abel's sacrifice is accepted, again typifying union between man and God. The eye of God is seen to be watching over man and requiring an account of the sin committed against his fellow-man, awarding punishment, and teaching men that they are responsible the one for the other. Thus, although men by sin may separate themselves from one another, yet the consciousness of the over-seeing eye of God, and the fact that they must give an account of themselves to God, will tend to check that sin and thus to check them from separation also.

In reading this story, as in reading the preceding one, it is

necessary to remember that underlying the whole teaching of the Bible is, on the one side sin, and the consequences of sin; on the other, hope and the gradual working out of God's scheme of redemption.

Birth of Cain.

Adam and Eve had fallen, and knew that they had fallen. How far they felt it, and saw in themselves the working out of the poison of sin, we cannot tell, but with the birth of Cain there seems to have sprung up in the heart of Eve the hope that her child might be innocent and that sin would not have dominion over him. She says, "I have gotten a man from the Lord." Would he be the foretold one who would crush the power of sin? But alas, how soon was she to be disappointed. The headstrong son and brother probably showed many of his characteristics when he was a boy, and so we find at the birth of Abel that her hope is fainter, and she calls Abel a breath or vapour.

Both sons work and both have a knowledge of their dependence upon God and draw near to Him in worship.

It has been thought that there is a God-given instinct in man which tells him that the approach to God must be made through sacrifice and the shedding of blood. The records of ancient nations show a widespread feeling of the necessity for sacrifices and show also that this feeling found expression even in the sacrifice of their own children. The Bible account is very simple. Cain approached God with fruit, Abel with the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. Cain was rejected, but Abel accepted.

Why was Abel accepted?

The answer to this is given partly in this chapter of Genesis and partly in the New Testament. "And the Lord had respect unto Abel and his offering, but unto Cain and his offering he had not respect." The reasons given for this preference are twofold:

1. Abel was doing what was right. We find this in 1 John iii. 12, "His works were evil and his brother's righteous." We find it also in God's answer to Cain, "If

thou doest well is there not acceptance?" This may have pointed to the character of the sacrifice, but more probably it is an allusion to the upright character of Abel as contrasted with the sinfulness of Cain.

2. The ground-work from which Abel's character of acceptance sprang is given in Hebrews ii. 4, "By faith Abel offered."

Abel drew near to God with genuine worship, and he was living out in his daily life his desire to be near God. If there had been a God-given command telling men to approach God through sacrifice and a revelation to them that in some way sacrifices pointed forward to the promised Deliverer, then Abel's faith and consequent acceptance is very clear, but without Scriptural warrant we cannot tell that this had been revealed. Cain's anger rose, we are told, and his face was turned against his brother. Then God reasoned with him; whether through conscience or personally we do not know. It had been his own choice; he had chosen to do ill; therefore, the consequences of ill followed, and sin crouched at his door.

This expression "sin lieth or croucheth at the door" is very forcibly explained by Maclaren in his *Expositions*. He points out that the force of the expression is that each sin we commit, becomes as it were, instinct with life. It lies waiting for us; it crouches at our door. It tries to tempt or drive us to further sin. In other words, the conclusion of the verse means that a sin once committed, we instinctively turn towards it instead of against it, and that that instinct has to be conquered and kept down throughout our after life. But, if sin hovers around the threshold of our heart, Christ also stands without at the door and knocks.

The Effect upon Cain.

Cain's heart which had risen in rebellion against God rejected this reasoning of God with him. He let the sin crouch at his door and lead him on to further sin. Jealousy and anger were in his heart, and they grew with the rapid growth peculiar to them. "Jealousy is cruel as the grave; the coals thereof are coals of fire." Cant. viii. 6.

When once these passions are in possession of men's hearts, they excite to deeds almost of madness, as in the present case with Cain. The account is most pathetic. The brothers are talking together, when a rush of anger comes over Cain and he rises up against his brother and slays him.

The Growth of Sin.

Alas! the sin does not end here. Directly it has been committed Cain passes, as it were, into the presence of God, and there is the awful consciousness that God knows and is a witness of his guilt. When Adam and Eve were called after their sin into the presence of God, they endeavoured to excuse themselves and selfishly to lay the blame upon one another. But Cain has fallen further under the power of sin. He lies (and how often is a lie the outgrowth of sin) "I know not." He questions his responsibility for his brother, in reality he raises the question of the responsibility of man to man. "Am I my brother's keeper?" His answer is full of defiance and of intense selfishness. Sin not only separates man from God, and from the sense of his duty towards God, but it separates man from man and makes men repudiate their responsibility towards their fellow-men. But, repudiated or not, that question which God asks Cain, "Where is Abel thy brother?" is a question for all time. It had to be answered by Cain. It will have to be answered by every descendant of Adam as long as the world lasts. God swept aside Cain's disavowal of responsibility. "What hast thou done?" "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth." Abel's blood cried aloud unto the Heavens and drew down the curse upon Cain.

The Sentence.

So the punishment descended of bitter, unrequited toil. The earth, which has received the blood of Abel, will in future be barren to Cain. Homeless wandering is to be his lot, that wandering which is a type of the

restlessness and homelessness which sin produces. There is but one home for the heart, "the sacred place of the Most High." Those only are at home and at peace who are united with God and who know Him. Others, like Cain, wander wearily for ever, finding no rest for the sole of their feet, and unmindful of the call of Jesus, "Come unto me ye weary and I will give you rest."

The Effect of the Punishment upon Cain.

It is not sin but the punishment of sin that affects Cain. He is concerned merely with the question of the curse upon himself. The sin against God, and the sin against his brother, does not seem to torture him. The appalling growth of self in Cain comes to a climax here. Even judgment from the lips of God brings nothing but the thought of himself and of what he will suffer in consequence. He cries out that the heavens and the earth will be to him as brass, and the consciousness of sin within him makes him feel that every man will wish to slay him as he has slain his brother.

God's Compassion on Cain.

God spares his life and forbids that he should be slain by man. The sin which he has committed is beyond human vengeance. Its atonement is between God, the avenger of the righteous, and Cain, not between man and man. Men are taught that God will avenge guilt and that blood feuds are not according to His will. What the mark was which was put upon Cain's forehead we do not know, God spared his life, and he was allowed to go forth to live and to work. But wherever he went men knew that God's judgment rested upon him, a token to them and a token to us that there is a King who will "take account of His servants." Matt. xviii. 23.

LESSON IV.

GENESIS IV.—V

THE TWO RACES.

Birth and Death.

The life of Cain was spared. We wonder why, for there had been no confession of sin, no desire for re-union with God, and there certainly was no amendment of life. Both he and his descendants seem to have lived in sin, and far away from God. The mystery of sin and the mystery of God's longsuffering with unrepentant sinners is insoluble. It cannot be known now; it will be revealed in the hereafter.

Certain facts are recorded of Cain and of his race. He built a city; his descendants multiplied. They were skilful and civilized. They were distinguished by ability, self-reliance and hardihood. Jubal was the inventor of musical instruments, and thus began the fine arts. Tubal Cain, an artificer in brass and iron, introduced the useful arts. Typical of the spirit of the whole race is what is called the Sword Song of Lamech. Perhaps a special notice is made of him because of his outstanding daring, and his defiance of the right. He is the first man recorded as having two wives, and from this time we find polygamy and its consequent evils in the world. His Sword Song contains his proud boasting before those wives. He has committed murder, but he makes a boast of it, and, as it were, dares either God or man to touch him. If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and seven fold. His is a positive defiance which breathes the very pride of life.

In contrast to Cain and to his race is the race of Seth. To Seth is born a son, Enos, and "then began man to call upon the name of the Lord." Even in these early ages there seems to have been a distinction according to which men belonged either to the kingdom of sin or to the kingdom of God. Cain and his descendants had openly joined the kingdom of sin ; Seth and his descendants stood apart and were known as having some knowledge and fear of God.

Enoch stands out pre-eminently among the latter because he had faith in God, and God was to him a reality, a living Personality, an existent ever-present Being. Towards Him his whole life turned, for he walked with God. "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" He must have been pure in heart, for it is the pure in heart who see God. Moreover, we see that he was no recluse living a life of solitary communion and fellowship with God, for he played his part in life, he begat sons and daughters, he cared for the condition of those around him. He prophesied of the judgment to come, and of the responsibility which each man had because of that judgment. He prophesied that they would have to give account, not only of their ungodly deeds, but also of their hard speeches which they had spoken against God (Jude 14 and 15).

The story of Enoch is of peculiar interest for two other reasons. He was the seventh son from Seth, just as Lamech was the seventh from Cain. As Lamech breathed the pride of life, so Enoch breathed the beauty of spiritual communion with God ; and he showed that such spiritual life and communion was possible even when wickedness was at the height it reached during the lifetime of Lamech. Men were daring not only ungodly deeds but hard speeches against God ; Enoch dared a life of protest against the surrounding evil, a life of purity and of communion with God.

The second point of peculiar interest is that he "was not, for God took him." We sometimes notice how little there is in the Old Testament about the resurrection from the dead. If men feared God, earthly prosperity was promised to them as their reward, and we long to know how much

was revealed to them as to the future life. More powerful than any direct teaching must have been the translation of Enoch and Elisha, both "were not, for God took them," and the men who knew that they had passed into the presence of God, must have known that there was a future life, must have known that there was a hereafter for themselves and for every child of man. This, like so much Old Testament teaching, was given, we might almost say, in the form of object lessons. We often long to know how much was formerly revealed. We know that the question as to the future is as old as the human race itself, and that the question of Job was the question of thousands of his day and of every succeeding generation, "If a man die shall he live again?"

Birth and Death.

The story of the descendants of Seth has little interruption beyond the bright example of Enoch, and the hope expressed by Lamech that his son Noah might bring comfort and remove the curse which had fallen from God upon the earth. Otherwise, there is only the record of the two great facts of life, birth and death. They lived, they begat sons, they died. Each one passed to his account with God, and his story was left in the hand of God and God only. How much joy and sorrow was bound up in those long lives, lives which sometimes lasted for more than nine hundred years, we cannot tell. What hopes, what longings, what keen disappointments, what struggles, what pain, what joy, what weariness, what passions of love, hate and of anger were the portion of each. But, as we read the chapter, the same thought comes into our minds that comes to us as we pass through some country churchyard where every name is unknown to us, that is to say the feeling that each life after all is God's in its ultimate issue, lived to God, and left with God. Alike the sons of Cain and the sons of Seth have passed away to their great account.

As we think of the long lives of these men, we see several reasons why they should have been thus prolonged. When

men were so few upon the earth, long life was necessary if the world was to be rapidly populated, if an advance in knowledge and art was to be made, and, above all, if the knowledge and worship of God was to be handed down from generation to generation.

The period of time between Adam and Noah, Edersheim says, is almost spanned by two lives, those of Adam and Lamech, for Lamech died only five years before the Flood.

We wonder sometimes what the general effect of those long lives must have been upon the characters of men. The apparent security of life must have tempted them to think little of the hereafter and much of the present; and it is strange to notice that Enoch's life was only half the length of that of most of his race. It seems as though God knew how hard a battle he was fighting, and in mercy took him to Himself; just as in our own day God often calls one of His servants away from the forefront of the battle, where he has been marked out in His service.

The question as to why men's lives should have been so long before the Flood, and so short after cannot be answered. It may have been due to physical circumstances, such as changes in the constitution either of man or of the earth, or by the direct will of God. Whatever the answer may be, the record stands thus, and stands, not only in the Bible record of the Jews, but also in the traditions of other nations. It is said that all ancient nations of which we have record have left traditions as to the extraordinary length of the lives of the early races upon earth.

LESSON V.

GENESIS VI. VII. VIII.

THE FALLING AWAY OF THE SONS OF GOD.

"It Shall be Sent."

Fifteen hundred years had passed since Adam and Eve had left the garden of Eden, a period of time as long as from the coming of Christ to the days of the Reformation, and yet, according to some reckonings, all that time had been spanned by the lives of two men. It was a sad period, for it was marked by the ever-increasing sinfulness of man.

In the preceding chapters we have seen that the earth was divided into the kingdom of this world, a kingdom of pride and self-sufficiency, and a kingdom of men who were called sons of God because of their allegiance to Him. But at the close of this period, these two distinctions have almost passed away. In the first place, the sons of God, that is, the sons of those who stood for the right, have intermarried with the daughters of Cain because they were very fair, and have become evil like their wives, and so, gradually violence and corruption have filled the whole world. In the second place, the rare occurrence of death seems to have given a feeling of security in sin. There is no question but that the thought, that we must soon appear before the judgment seat of Christ, does much to check our carelessness and to help us to realize our responsibility. The sin, the darkness and the wickedness must have been beyond our present power of imagination. No details are given, but the whole story, both of the sin and

of the judgment upon it, is told in very simple language, so that even a child can understand it. When this wickedness, this darkness, this era of vileness and corruption was at its height, the eye of God beheld it.

The Imagination of Man's Heart.

We, who have learned something of God's holiness, and of the awfulness of sin when brought face to face with that holiness, find something very terrible in the thought that God, who had created the beauty, the goodness and the calm of Eden, should have seen the earth as it then was; and the condition into which it had fallen. We learn that God's eye saw the evil, and pierced at once to the cause of it. God saw that it proceeded from the heart of man, and that every imagination and thought of his heart was only evil continually. What death sentence more awful could possibly be written? If the thoughts of the heart are only evil continually, what will the outcome of the words and acts be? David realized this, and his prayer was, "Create in me a clean heart, O God."

The Longsuffering of God.

We wonder, as we realize God's purity on the one hand, and the corruption and violence of man on the other; that man, together with the whole living creation was not instantly swept away. But God's mercy and forbearance far transcends our mercy. A period of one hundred and twenty years was given for repentance. During that time not only warning as to what was coming, but also an example of righteousness was to be given. At the end of the time, all who were not repentant, together with all living creation, were to be swept away in one common flood. That those men who were a plague spot upon the earth should be swept away was a necessary outcome of sin, but the sad part then, as always, was that the punishment fell not upon the sinner alone, but upon those around him, upon his little children, and upon the living creation which had been committed to his care and over which he had dominion.

In the story of Nineveh, God grieved for the six score thousand children who could not discern between the right hand and the left, and also for "the much cattle," and rejoiced to spare them when the people repented; but although God may have grieved for the innocent, there was no repentance and the blow fell upon all alike.

The one Exception.

Amid the general darkness Noah shone forth with a ray of Heavenly light, one man just, when all around were unjust; one man upright, and upright in his day and generation, doing his duty in his appointed place although all around were corrupt and filled with the violence of uncontrolled passion. Abel and Enoch had been righteous, and struggled against the sin that surrounded them, but they could not prevail; and, their time of protest over, they did not reach the then allotted space of life. But Noah's character was grander and his endurance longer. The sin around him was greater, yet he refused to have part or lot in it, and he refused to accept the then state of the world as final. He was a preacher of righteousness and he continued to witness for God.

The secret of his separation from sin, and the secret of his power to stand alone is given. Noah, like Enoch, walked with God. His thoughts, his acts, his words, were constantly over-shadowed by the presence of God, and ennobled by communion with Him. He was not spiritually alone in his protest and in his struggle against sin, because he had learned, like Gordon at Khartoum, the secret of the immediate presence of God. His work and his preaching give from his very isolation and the mockery with which he was surrounded a challenge which rings out to every servant of God to follow him. He stands out as an example for all time that the sin of others can never excuse our own sin. The call comes to every man as much as it did to Noah, to come out and be separate. Each man is responsible for himself, each man has the same source of strength and communion open to him.

The Judgment passed upon the Earth.

With judgment is mingled mercy. A way of salvation is opened before Noah by which not only his life and that of his children, but also the life of the animal creation around may be continued upon the earth. What strikes us most in reading the Bible stories of these heroes of old is the simplicity of their faith and the readiness of their obedience. The command is given and obeyed. "Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he!"

Noah was bidden to make an ark, which, if we want to get an idea of its size, we may compare with the "Lusitania," or one of the largest ships that has ever been built. The ark was planned in a way peculiarly fitted for its purpose. A Dutchman, Jansen, once constructed a smaller boat on the same model, and found that it accommodated three times as much storage as an ordinary boat of the same size. The gopher wood, of which the ark was made, was one of great endurance. It must have cost Noah much of his substance, however wealthy he was, to undertake a work involving the use of so much expensive material and the labour of so many men. We know further, that he was a preacher of righteousness, and that, whilst he built, he endeavoured to avert the flood by exhorting those around him to turn from the evil of their ways. So Jeremiah sought to avert the destruction of Israel by his prophecies, and Christ the destruction of Jerusalem by His revelation of Himself and of His mercy. We know how utterly Noah's words were disregarded, for he was mocked at and despised. Christ says "They ate, they drank, they were given in marriage," implying that Noah was looked upon as a fanatic, whilst all continued to do evil as before.

The Secret of his Strength.

We find also the secret of Noah's strength, "By faith, Noah being warned of God," and from his story we learn what faith can be. To Noah, the coming of the flood was a greater reality than anything else around him.

During the space of one hundred and twenty years, so strongly did he realize this fact that it became the prevailing power of his life; because of it he gave up his wealth; he became an object of derision, and devoted all that he had to preparing for its advent.

If the facts of our salvation, and the thought of our future life, as revealed to us by Christ, were as real to us as the coming flood was to Noah, how different would our present lives be!

Scholars tell us that there is an almost universal tradition among the nations of man, however scattered upon the earth, as to a deluge, or some great calamity which at an early period beset the earth. These traditions also give us an account of the ark, and have many striking points of agreement with the Bible story. Thus, the Chaldeans tell of the pitching of the ark without and within, the shutting of the door, the opening of the window, even the going out of the dove and of the raven.

Chaldean Account.

"I opened the windows and the light broke over my face. I sat down and wept. Over my face flowed my tears. Like reeds the corpses floated."

But the Bible account differs from all others in so far as God is declared to be the author of the deluge; it is His punishment for sin, and His mercy that is shown towards Noah. Possibly Moses, inspired by God, gave the story as it had been handed down to him, with the glad message that God in wrath remembered mercy.

The Scriptural Account.

The story of the Flood, as we find it in the Bible, like the story of the creation, has the dignity and the grandeur which distinguishes it as God-given. We learn from it at once that God is the author of the judgment that has fallen, that the judgment is a definite punishment for sin, and the punishment was sent in mercy to man. We may have the same facts as in other accounts, but the facts do not stand out like dreary rocks in a waste land, they

are the definite working and purpose of a God of judgment, of righteousness and of mercy. The very silence of Scripture as to the awful desolation and misery, the terror of those who had despised the warning, the sadness of Noah at the catastrophe which he could not avert, is full of meaning. There are periods in a man's own history, in the history of a nation, in the history of the world, too terrible to be touched by anything but silence, a silence which strikes an inmost chord in the heart of every thoughtful man.

At last the Flood abated. After five months the ark touched ground, and the fountains of the deep, together with the rain, were restrained. In two and a half months the higher land was seen ; in two months more the face of the earth was visible ; in another two it was dry. And God remembered Noah. That is to say, though the greatness of man's sin was such that in justice he might have been swept off the face of the earth, yet God, in mercy, remembered Noah, and allowed the waters to abate, so that the earth could once again become a dwelling place for man.

The New World.

We all understand the longing of Noah to know the condition of the world, and his consequent sending forth of the raven and the dove. The two birds may be taken to represent the spirits of good and of evil. The raven was content with the world as she found it. The dead bodies floating everywhere provided her with food, and death and desolation were not repugnant to her. But the dove sought life, and returned to the ark until, on her second flight, she found life in the budding olive tree, and brought back a leaf as a signal of hope to Noah, and rejoicing in the general spring-tide was content to stay outside. At last the command of God came to leave the ark, for the time for the establishment of the promised covenant was at hand.

The Purified Faith.

To what a changed world Noah came forth. A world purified from its corruption, freed from the death and

degradation that had been in it. But as he stood there, with the sunlight and new life all around him, many doubts and questions must have come into his mind, or, if they did not come into his mind, they would certainly come into the minds of his descendants. Was a world that could be subjected to so awful a judgment worth living in, was it worth cultivating?

The First Sacrifice.

From the ordinances which God gave after the Flood, it seems as though these thoughts must have been in Noah's mind, and that God read and answered them. For the moment a holy fear and deep thankfulness seems to have been present with him. He built an altar and sacrificed upon it. For the moment, at any rate, the world, through its baptism and the accepted sacrifice of Noah, was in harmony with the will of God. The note of thankfulness was the first and only one struck. As God had before looked upon the corruption of the earth, so now he looked upon its sweet savour, and in answer gave forth the ordinances which would best meet man's need.

Change of Ordinances.

1. God in mercy recognized that the curse of sin had passed upon the earth, and had to be reckoned with in dealing with man, and taking this fact into consideration, promised never again to curse the ground for man's sake.

2. God gave Noah a charter containing the great primal laws of nature, and sealed it with His assurance, and the promise that it should be as lasting as the earth itself. "Seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease."

3. God caused certain great changes to pass over the relationship between man and beast. The relationship up to this time had been that of a master who had dominion over his subjects. The relationship was from this time forward to be one of enmity rather than of service. The fear of man was to be upon every beast on the earth. It is a sad change when we pass from willing service

to one of dread and fear, but it is a change which man has brought upon the world by his own sin. We can see an additional reason for this change. In fact, after the Flood when men were so few, the animals would increase with rapidity, and might overspread the earth, so that he could no longer have dominion over them. A further change is that the animals are ordained to be used for food. We do not know whether they had been used for food before the Flood, but after it they are ordained, together with the herb of the ground, to be the universal food of man.

4. There is a change in the vengeance meted out to the murderer. When the blood of Abel was shed, God had required it at the hand of Cain, so that man might not avenge the murder. But now, when human blood is shed, men are told that they are to take vengeance, and they are to require it at the hand of one another. Life after this was to be of comparatively short duration ; and it may have been that man, knowing the short duration of life, and knowing that all humanity had been swept away by the Flood, might have held life to be of little account, but God reminds Noah that man is made in the image of God, that life is sacred, and that man must guard it, because God will require an account of it. "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed."

The Rainbow and its Message.

But a glorious light is shed over all the new and changed conditions of life, which otherwise might have brought fear and uncertainty with them. Just as later, God made the stars a sign of His covenant with Abraham, so now, He makes the rainbow the sign of His covenant with and mercy to Noah. The rainbow standing out against the dark cloud, radiant with glorious colour, overarching the earth is a symbol of God's love to him and to us.

When Noah and his sons looked at it, their first thought must have been a joyful one. They would remember God's pledge that, however heavy the fall of rain might be, another flood of like nature would never come. To us, when we look at it, it signifies much more. Although God will

never again destroy the earth, destruction of another kind comes upon us. There are times in our lives in which the flood of trouble, of sorrow, of sin and of desolation, seems to sweep away everything that we hold dear. But as we look upon the rainbow we know that every sorrow and trouble is overarched, is bounded in with the sunshine of His presence, and of His love and mercy towards us. Beyond the darkness, and beyond the trouble, is the arch of God's glory. Looking through it we see almost into Heaven itself, and we turn away from the flood of trouble which has swept over us to the thought of the presence of God, a presence that can never change nor leave us. It has, moreover, its purpose. Overwhelming as the flood of trouble may be, we know that it is doing its appointed work of purification, and that though God's waves and His billows are passing over us, "Thus far shall they come, and no farther." The time will come when the words, "Peace be still" will be heard; and there will be a clearer vision of the King in His beauty, and the land that is very far off.

LESSON VI.

GENESIS XI.

"THE BIRTH OF HEATHENISM."

Men still Unchanged.

The Flood had cleansed the earth from sin, and had carried away the men whose thoughts were only evil continually. God's judgments can terrify sinners, but they do not change the thoughts of their hearts ; these must be changed from within by the indwelling Spirit, by the still small voice of God. From Chapter x., we learn that men multiplied rapidly and began to overspread the earth, and that some of them were mighty warriors, especially **Nimrod**, the great hunter, or as he is called, "the warrior monarch."

The Foundation of Babylon and Nineveh.

There are certain parts of the world which are known as its great battlefields ; there are other places which by their physical advantages are its world centres, and of these Babylon and Nineveh are among the first. Babylon, the great power, which alternately with Egypt, either threatened or dominated not only Israel, but also the then known world, had been the site of a great city from the very earliest years. The account of Babel as a mighty power at this early age has been confirmed during the last few years by the Assyrian monuments which have been discovered. From these we learn that Babel was the original city of the Empire, and that the power of Babylon extended over many other kingdoms, reaching even as far as Nineveh. The founding

of Nineveh, is given in Genesis x. and xi., and the name of Nimrod occurs in the old monuments recently discovered.

The Tower of Birs Nimrud.

Besides these ancient monuments, the foundations of a very ancient city have been discovered, which are of incredibly vast dimensions. Babylon has been said to have been five times larger even than London itself. There has also been discovered at some distance from the town of Babylon, a tower called Birs Nimrud ; this is some hundred years later than the foundations of the town of Babylon ; but travellers tell us that it was dedicated to the seven planets, and had at the top a chapel in which they were worshipped. The main interest to us lies, not in the actual details of the story given in the Bible, but in the great lessons to be learned from them. Indeed, as we read it, we notice an absence of detail. How were the languages divided and scattered ? Was the City of Babylon for a time overthrown ? The essential part to us lies, not in the answer to these questions, but in the great moral and spiritual lessons contained in the chapter.

The Tower of Babel.

Before the Flood the thoughts and the imaginations of man's heart were only evil continually ; after the Flood we see that they were still evil continually. This is the force of the passage, " Now nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do." The imagination of men's hearts was to free themselves from all restraint, to raise themselves in pride of power, so that they might lift themselves into gods rather than men. " The tower whose top may reach to Heaven." " The kings of the earth stand up and their rulers take counsel together against the Lord." Man always thinks, and will think, that he is sufficient to himself. The prodigal son wearis of home and its restraint, and will go into a far country. He will drift whither he chooses, and suffice for himself. This is the spirit of the world, this is heathenism, whether it is found in an individual or in a nation.

God's Judgment on Self-sufficiency.

A powerful city thus united in self-sufficiency and in open defiance of God would threaten the future history of the world. It would crush out smaller nations, oppress any land which sought the Divine protection and looked beyond the State to God ; hence the necessity for overthrow, not only as a lesson for the then time, but also as a warning to all future ages. God spoke unto them in His wrath, but tempered wrath with mercy. Separation was the punishment which fell upon Adam and Eve for rebellion, and upon Cain, and it fell also upon the proud builders of Babel. From that time forth until once again the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, nations have been, and as far as we can tell will be, separated from one another. That common interchange of thought and speech which should be of the greatest benefit to mankind, enabling the results of invention and discovery to be at once known from one end of the earth to the other, has, in consequence of man's sin, been restrained. The barrier of language has isolated nations from one another, and prevented their sharing in common the advances of science, thought, and culture. But whilst it has hindered good, it has also hindered evil. As long as man's heart and his imaginations are evil continually, there will be transmission of evil and contamination ; hence the necessity for separation. And so we see how sin gradually worked its way. It first separated man from God, then man from man, until at this time it went further and separated nation from nation.

Spiritual Lessons.

There is a spiritual lesson, which, though not then understood, nor lying on the face of the story, can yet be read into it. The building of the Tower of Babel is a figure of the way of approach by which men wish to come to God. Man thinks that he can by himself find out God, that by his intellect, his culture, his imagination, he can become God-like. But God deals otherwise with man. We may make a tower of our own intellect and imagination, whose

top will reach as we think to Heaven, but Heaven comes near when God bends down and breathes his spirit into the heart of man. The call of God to the heart of Abram brought Abram more truly into the spiritual presence than the loftiest tower that the inhabitants of Babel could build. God bends down, and if men respond to his call, he lifts them to himself; but if in self-sufficiency they try to force themselves into what is divine, He shatters their pride and makes them a foolishness to themselves and to others.

Hope of Reunion.

The question then arises, Will this cloud of separation ever be lifted? Has one common tongue ever again prevailed, or will it ever prevail? Once only thus far in the history of the world has that cloud been lifted, and that was on the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit of God was outpoured upon the earth. At the outpouring of that Spirit which was to change the imagination of men's hearts from evil to God, a common message was given. The crowds gathered together from every part of the then known world, heard every man speak in his own tongue in which he was born—a foretaste of the hereafter. There is another foretaste in the spread of God's word to-day throughout the world. The Bible, or part of it, is now translated into 460 tongues. No other book is translated into more than 100. This translation of the Bible is being continued, and the message of salvation sent to every kindred, tongue, and people. This means that though there is not a common language, there is a common thought, that is to say, although the actual words in which the thought is spoken are still different, yet the message of God's love, and of His power to save from sin, is being sent into every part of the world. Wherever the curse has rested there the good news of the remedy for that curse has come, or is about to come. The inspired word of God is uniting the spirits and souls of men in one common union to God, in one common thought about God, in one common hatred against sin.

Prophecy of the Hereafter.

Will this limitation ever be removed? The answer to this question was given in visions to Saint John. He heard a new song sung by men redeemed out of every tongue and nation. He heard all nations and tongues unite in crying, "Salvation to our God," and in a last vision he heard the voice of a great multitude as the voice of mighty thunderings saying, "Alleluia for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

LESSON VII.

GENESIS XII. 9—XIII.

“THE FOUNDING OF A NATION.”

A GREAT change now passed over the dealings of God with men. From the time of Adam men had turned again and again away from God. A new kingdom was to be founded, and for this work God called out one man who would walk by faith and not by sight, and who, by his obedience and generosity, would show the attitude which ought to characterize the men of that kingdom.

Early knowledge of God.

Abram, an inhabitant of a city called Ur of the Chaldees, was the man chosen for this purpose. Until recent years very little was known about the city of Ur. It is now generally thought to be Mugheir, on the right bank of the Euphrates, and many inscriptions have been found telling about it, and even speaking of one Aburami, who is generally thought to be Abraham.

Professor Sayce says the remains of the city now consist of a series of low mounds, oval-shaped, about two miles in extent; they contain also the ruins of a temple to the Moon God. The whole district was once wonderfully fertile. Herodotus says that no part of the known world was so fruitful in grain, blades of wheat often being as large as four fingers in breadth. There was also abundance of palm trees, of wine and of honey. But idolatry abounded, especially the worship of the heavenly bodies, which in that part of the world, shone with peculiar brilliancy.

The inhabitants were of many nationalities, chiefly descendants of Ham. They were a cultivated people, studying mathematics and law, and with a knowledge of government ; they were skilled workers in metals and gems ; the art of handwriting was known, and there was a library of 90,000 tablets, all catalogued. They observed a seventh day, for we find the keeping of a day of rest established long before the time of Abram.

Ur was a flourishing town with a harbour and fleets of ships. Owing to the silting of the sand, which is so great that it covers a mile every seven years, Ur is now seventy miles distant from the sea.

Call of Abram.

A tribe belonging to the descendants of Shem had settled in Ur. It is of interest to note how, from time to time, we find that the knowledge of God existed outside the Jewish race. We find men of faith, like Melchizedek, Job and Jethro, who knew God and obeyed Him, although there is no record of a special revelation being made to them. We think of early times as being very dark. We do not know, and never shall know, how much God-given light there always was, and has been even in the dark places of the earth.

The tribe from which Abram sprang, had probably kept the knowledge and fear of God more clearly than most of the tribes around them, but it is a matter of doubt whether, if they had remained in Ur, this would have continued to be the case. We find that there was idolatry among them, thus, Joshua, xxiv. 15, says : "Choose you this day whom you will serve ; whether the gods which your fathers served, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell ; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." So, too, we find that there were idols in the house of Laban, for Rachel stole the images or household gods, and took them away with her.

A distinct call was to come to Abram, but it is not told us how that call came. Was it a vision, did God speak face to face, or was it an instinct of his heart

that told him he must depart and leave his country? A great thrill must have passed through Abram as he realized that God was a living reality, that He had individual knowledge of him, and an individual purpose towards him. We can almost see Abram passing up and down among his own people, occupied with his daily work, yet all the time with the call of God ringing in his ear, the hand of God upon his shoulder impelling him to come out. Abram was the first of many to whom the same Heavenly vision, call, and impulse have come, for the question of lifting the eyes from this earth to the world above, of realizing the promise of a new country, a new citizenship, which calls for labour and for the abandonment of self and separation, is as real to-day as it was in the days of Abram.

In response to the call, Abram, together with his father Terah and others of his family, left Ur and went as far as Haran, but stayed there only until after the death of Terah, when the call came again, and together with it a sevenfold promise. The promise was great, but as Abram had no son, it seemed impossible that it should be fulfilled. To leave his country involved certain loss, but, on the other hand, there was the prospect of a great future for his race. What we notice most in the call is that it appealed to Abram for the sake of others. Cain had disclaimed responsibility for his brother; the promise to Abram is that he will be a blessing to others and that in him all families of the earth shall be blessed. The appeal which was made to him was to give up worldly wealth and ease, and one of the motives put before him was that, by doing so, he could bring good to others. How far Abram realized all that the call entailed upon him we do not know any more than when God's call comes to us we realize at once what the cost of obeying it will be; but Abram certainly knew that he would have to leave a very prosperous town, and live among warlike and evil people. He may also have known that he would be a wanderer, dwelling in tents until his death, always subject to the law of God, a law not recognized by the men among whom he dwelt.

The Response of Abram.

The story is told with the simplicity which over and over again strikes us as we read the history of the heroes of the Bible. These men obeyed God and made their great renunciation for Him as silently as the men who are called by God to-day, the matter was between them and God, and God knew, and God only, what each step of the way cost.

The account here is, "They went forth to go into the land of Canaan, and into the land of Canaan they came." Abram has the honour of being the leader of those who seek to inhabit the earth, not for themselves, but for God ; the leader of those whose main impulse and motive of action is that others may be blessed through them, and the kingdom of God advanced.

The Departure of Abram.

Whenever a man has a single purpose and bends his whole soul towards that purpose, he is certain to influence others around him in the same direction. Abram did not go forth alone ; Sarai, his wife, Lot, his brother's son, and the souls they had gotten in Haran went with him. Notice in passing, the contrast between the relationship of Abram and his dependents with the attitude of the masters of modern times. Abram went out with "the souls he had gotten in Haran"; whereas we speak of the hands which we employ. The freemen and the slaves that Abram took with him, were to him living souls, and we know in consequence how faithfully they served him.

Abram's Conduct as he passed through the Country.

We learn from the book of Joshua, the character of the inhabitants of the land, and that, although later God told Abram that the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full, that is to say, their sin had not yet become so abominable that they had to be swept off the face of the earth, yet it was there and would surround him on every side. Abram made no concession to the Canaanites or to their idolatry. Wherever he went he built an altar to God, and openly

worshipped and served Him. He, as it were, took possession of the land for God, just as an Englishman plants his flag in a new country. Abram by faith looked beyond the awful idolatry and sin around him, and believed that God would one day make that country His own. Each altar was a standard of faith and remained a witness that the worship of God would one day prevail throughout the country. As he travelled through the land, it must have seemed to Abram but a small country. If he had climbed Mount Ebal he could have seen almost the whole landscape, and might have wondered why God had chosen so small and insignificant a land for the chosen country. But Canaan, we can now see, had its advantages; it was shut in by the desert and by the sea; it was guarded by the land and by the mountains. Whether it was a centre of the then known world or not, it was at any rate a highway of communication between the old world empires, and had many natural advantages, "A land flowing with milk and honey."

The Sin of Abram.

A fierce temptation now came upon Abram and he fell before it. There was a famine in the land, and Abram, whether acting on his own impulse, or under the guidance of God, went down into Egypt. It seems as though it were upon his own impulse, for heavy trouble followed.

In order to protect himself, and probably thinking that by so doing he could protect Sarai also, he told her to call herself his sister. He may have thought that, as the sister of a wealthy chieftain, her hand would not be asked in marriage without certain formalities having been gone through. These would give him time to tell the truth and to effect her escape; moreover the deception did not seem so great to him because she was his half sister. She was taken into the household of Pharaoh, and might have become his wife had not God plagued the household of Pharaoh for her sake, when the truth was discovered and Pharaoh bade Abram depart. Though Abram had been specially called and blessed of God, he was liable to fall

into temptation, and the thought that he had thus dishonoured God among the Egyptians, must have been very bitter to him.

Abram's Dealing with Lot.

Abram returned with Lot to Canaan and settled there. Lot, from the first, may have followed Abram from mixed motives. His character was now to be tested. He may have caught something of the fire of Abram's devotion to God, he certainly had learnt about God and wished to follow Him; but he cared for wealth also. He followed God afar off, putting his wealth first.

Both men had become rich in cattle, and it was difficult to find pasture for so great a multitude. A family feud was impending. The herdsmen strove with one another. If their masters joined with them, what would be the strife, what would be the result? Here the greatness of Abram's character came out, and we can learn from his conduct how to deal with a quarrel. Abram was the elder, he had been called of God to the land; it was to be his inheritance. Lot had followed him and was under his protection. Abram, both as elder and as leader, had every right to choose what he wanted for himself, and to give Lot the second portion. But Abram had already shown that righteousness was the prevailing principle of his life. He was also a peacemaker. He cared for higher things than wealth, fields or cattle. He called Lot, bade him take the choice of the whole land, and go where he would, so that there would be no more cause for strife. Lot, seeking wealth, grasped at the advantage offered him through the generosity of Abram, and made his choice for wealth and wealth only. He chose the land of Sodom, although the men there were sinners exceedingly. He risked not only his purity of life, his communion with God, but also the dangers of evil society for his family and dependents. Abram took the poorer ground, together with the service of God, and chanced all else; Lot took the richer land and chanced all else. And so they separated, Abram to the heights and Lot to the plains.

Promise to Abram.

But God who had marked all, knew the singleness with which His servant had followed Him and drew near to Him. He bade him lift up his eyes for all the land, eastward, westward, northward, and southward, should be his and belong to his seed for ever. God went further, he understood the character of Abram and allowed him to take his inheritance, "by faith and not by sight." He gave Abram no present possession of the land, but He bade him rise up and walk through it, and realize by faith that it was already his.

LESSON VIII.

GENESIS XIV.

"THE KING OF SALEM."

The four Kings of the East.

The fourteenth chapter of Genesis is one of peculiar interest. There is a marvellously vivid account given of the struggle between the four kings of the East, and the five kings of the West, which foreshadows the future struggles between the kings of Assyria and Babylon on the one side and Egypt on the other. The question as to the balance of power between the East and the West, which began at this time, continued to be an ever-present factor in Jewish history, because the land of Canaan or Israel lay between these two great powers. The aim of both the East and the West was to gain control over the land of Canaan, and thus take possession of a vantage ground of attack.

This chapter contains the history of the first conflict of the precursor of the great Assyrian power with the forefathers of the Jewish race. It is one of the very earliest records of a military campaign, and we can trace all the movements with clearness and precision.

For many years the authenticity of this chapter of Genesis was disputed by the critics, but during the last few years ancient records have been found which have wonderfully borne witness to the names contained in it.

The further interest of the chapter lies in the vivid delineation of the character of Abram and in the way

in which Melchizedek, one of the grandest and most mysterious figures of Old Testament history, comes for a moment into contact with Abram.

The Battle of the four Kings against five.

Chedorlaomer, king of one of the neighbouring tribes of Babylon had obtained the supremacy of the surrounding district and represented at that time the greatest world power in the East. He had entered into a league with other neighbouring powers, and, in conjunction with them, had obtained command of all the low-lying land including the vale of Sodom, and for thirteen years his supremacy had been endured. But at last the king of Sodom, and four other kings who were allied with him, revolted.

Chedorlaomer in chastisement fell upon them and a great battle took place. The kings of Sodom, who knew the locality, should have derived great advantage from the fact that the vale of Siddim, which was full of slime pits, was chosen to be the battle ground, but they and their men had been so enfeebled by years of licentiousness and sin that they could not hold their own, and were taken captive. Among them was Lot, at that time an inhabitant of Sodom.

The Action of Abram.

It is the capture of Lot which brings the struggle of the four kings against five kings into Bible History, and illustrates still further the character of Abram and of Lot.

Abram might have kept away from the whole struggle. It was not any concern of his, for Lot had chosen the vale of Sodom, and had made his choice knowing the wickedness of the country and of its inhabitants. Why should he not be left to abide the consequences of his act? After all it was a fair judgment upon him. He had taken advantage of the generosity of Abram and had thus over-reached Abram. Why should Abram concern himself further about him? But Abram feared God, and therefore recognized his duty towards his brother. He did not, like Cain, say "am I my brother's keeper?" If we meted out only justice, and

justice such as we conceive it, towards those around us, how very far we should be from the character of Christ ; how very far from the long patience, the generosity, and the helpfulness which He showed not only towards His enemies, but also towards His disciples and friends who were slow of heart to understand Him.

Abram gathered together his trained servants, now 318, born in his house. He descended upon the allied armies, divided his forces, attacked them by night, was victorious, and brought back both Lot and all the spoil which had been taken from Lot, and which was found in the army.

The Effect upon Lot's Character.

What effect would this disaster have upon Lot? Would he see the fatal consequences of his choice? Here was his first warning, his first chance of escape; here too was the generosity, the noble example of Abram. Would he not be touched by that? But underlying the affection which Lot had for Abram, and his gratitude to him, underlying his fear of God, there was a still deeper and more determining love of wealth. He was one of the countless multitude who since his day have followed God, convinced that they can serve two masters; that they can hold wealth first and God next. Lot might have taken warning, have left Sodom for ever, and the wealth which he had accumulated there, and having saved his own life and the lives of his family might have worked out a new and fairer life for himself and for them.

Abram's Noble Action and its Result.

As far as wealth was concerned, Abram gained nothing by what he had done. There was great wealth among the men of Sodom, and he had only to put out his hand and take the share of it which was offered to him by the king of Sodom. According to the law of tribes, the fair reward for rescue was that Abram should have all the booty if he would restore the persons taken in battle. But if Abram had touched the wealth of Sodom, he would have been

connected with its sin, and that was so abhorrent to him that he would have nothing to do with it. He said that he had lifted up his hands to the Lord, the most high God, and that he would not take from a thread to a shoelatchet, lest he should be under any obligation whatsoever to Sodom.

He asks that indemnity should be given to those who had been fighting under him—indemnity for what they had eaten, and for the cattle they had slain, but for himself and for his own people he demands nothing at all. In this way he wishes to be entirely separate from the dwellers in these evil cities, so that they can hereafter make no claim upon him.

When he had gathered together his servants and entered into the battle, he had done it with one purpose, and one purpose only, the rescue of Lot; that rescue effected, his work was done, and accordingly he withdrew again into the mountains.

The King of Salem.

But this was not the end of the matter. Abram had put separation from sin, and righteousness first, that is to say, the spiritual before the material, and he received a blessing according to what he had chosen. He had chosen the spiritual, and a spiritual blessing came. With the king of Sodom was the king of Salem, one after referred to by David as a type of Christ. “Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.” One referred to in the Book of Hebrews as “like unto the Son of God.” Much interest and wonder has centred around the question as to who Melchizedek was. The Bible tells us little. He was a king of righteousness, evidently known and acknowledged by all the nations around him as the representative and servant of the great God.

It is strange to find a man like Melchizedek when the knowledge of God seemed to rest only with Abram and his family; but, from the account of Melchizedek, and of Job, it seems clear that there was a light of God upon the nations whom we might otherwise think were settling

down into utter darkness. Melchizedek, like Enoch, seems to have walked with God, to have had intercourse with Him, and to have made intercession with God for the men and nations which surrounded him.

He met Abram returning from the slaughter and gave him bread and wine and blessed him. Abram and his seed were hereafter to take possession of the very country of Melchizedek, and Melchizedek gave Abram bread and wine, that is to say, the first fruits of the fatness of the country, as a pledge that God would hereafter give to him and to his seed the full possession of the country which he had just delivered from the hands of Chedorlaomer.

Melchizedek is spoken of in Hebrews as a type of Christ. Christ gave to His disciples, and gives to us still at the Communion Feast, bread and wine, the first fruits to us of the riches of the Heavenly Kingdom, which His servants will one day inherit through Him. Abram received the bread and wine from Melchizedek as a pledge both of the earthly kingdom which he would inherit, and of the Heavenly Kingdom which he and all who like him believed in God will one day receive.

The Giving of Tithes.

The question next arises, Why did Abram give tithes to Melchizedek? He would receive nothing from the king of Sodom, Why should he give a tenth to Melchizedek? Had he received booty from Sodom he would have taken it as his due, but in giving a tenth to Melchizedek, he acknowledged Melchizedek as his superior and owned him king as well as priest. We can believe that he acted on a God-given impulse; that whether aware of its significance or not, he acknowledged Melchizedek as a type of Christ, as a king of righteousness, who then owned the land, and from whom he and his seed would one day receive it, and rule over it in righteousness. There is much interest in this, as well as a lesson to be learned from the giving of this tenth to God. We usually think of the giving of a tenth as belonging to the Jewish Dispensation, and sometimes as a Jewish law which has passed

away and is no longer binding upon men, whereas, when we think of it as dating back to the time of Abram, it is no longer a claim made by Jewish law, but a joyful privilege. How many of God's children from the time of Abram to the present day have turned with joy and gratitude to place a tenth and much more of what God has given them in their Master's hands, or in the hands of His servants. The joy of giving grows with the joy of love till men count nothing, not even their lives, dear unto themselves.

God's Answer to Abram.

Abram had generously succoured Lot. He had refused the booty that might justly have been his, and had surrendered to Melchizedek a tenth of all that he owned. In what way was he recompensed for the great sacrifices which he made?

There is nothing more encouraging to the servants of God than to trace in the Bible how after each great crisis God draws near and answers the deepest thoughts of the hearts of His servants. This is especially the case whenever they have separated themselves from sin and refused to be touched by it. God now approached Abram and told him not to fear, for He would be his shield and his great reward. Our first impulse is to wonder why, in replying to the innermost thought of Abram's heart, God should have bidden him not to fear. Had he not come back victorious? Was he not absolutely free? Had he not shown his independence?

There may have been two reasons for fear; one connected with Chedorlaomer; the other with the spiritual promise of God to Abram.

In the first place, it was very likely that Chedorlaomer and his allied forces would, as soon as they had recovered themselves, turn against this brave warrior of the hills and endeavour to attack and overcome him.

In the second place, Abram had received the bread and wine, the first fruits of the country that his seed was to inherit. But of what value was a promise like this to him if he had no child? Whenever he went out of his tent, he must

have been met by the sound of the voices of the children of his servants playing at their tent doors, but his own tent was silent. Why had not God fulfilled His promise and given him a child? How was it possible that his seed should inherit the land if he and Sarai were so old, that it was contrary to the course of nature that a child should be given to them?

The Covenant Promise.

Then comes the beautiful promise and encouragement of God. Abram is brought out alone with God, is shown the stars of heaven and is given God's pledge that his seed shall be as many as the stars; and he believed, and it was counted to him for righteousness. But at the same time he asks for a pledge; some further token from the direct hand of God that His word will be fulfilled. Then followed a mysterious night scene.

According to the custom of the time, when a covenant was about to be made, the animals were divided, and the contracting parties passed up and down between them; but this Covenant was not between Abram and God, but the gift of God to Abram, so that Abram, when he had divided the carcasses, watched beside them. In the night a deep sleep fell upon him, and a vision was given to him. He saw that light which was the Light of God, the same light which led the Children of Israel by night through the wilderness, and which hovered over the Cherubim and Seraphim in The Temple, pass between the divided carcasses. God was giving His pledge to Abram. With the light of His presence came a vision of the after history of the Children of Israel. There was outlined the descent into Egypt, the bondage in Egypt, and the return into the Promised Land in the fulness of time, when, through their iniquity, the present inhabitants had been swept away.

After this, what did it matter to Abram that he dwelt in tents; that the gift of children was still withheld from him; that he had yielded up the spoil of Sodom? God's word was utterly pledged; His presence had confirmed His Covenant. Abram knew that he could look beyond him-

self and everything around him ; that, in God's own way, He was fulfilling a mysterious purpose, and that according to that purpose God would bring out a people to Himself, and that this people would fear God, and would be more than the stars of the sky in multitude.

As we read this story we understand why Abram was called the father of the faithful. “Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed.”

LESSON IX.

GENESIS XVI.—GENESIS XXI.

THE BIRTH OF THE FREEBORN AND OF THE SLAVE.

Who can Stand before Envy?

The story of the birth of Ishmael and of Isaac brings out the darker side of Eastern life. We find no prohibition of polygamy at this time, but we do find portrayed over and over again the misery and unhappiness which came not only to the women and children, but also to the head of the family, in consequence of a double marriage.

Although Abram had unwavering trust in God, he fell into difficulty and sin, and the difficulties which are recorded are those which resulted either from his own lax observance of the marriage bond, or that of others. It has been said, and truly, that everything unworthy that happened to him in his life happened to him in connection with Sarai, and yet she was a beautiful and attractive woman. She was passionately tender, and able to be touched by religion, but at the same time jealous as a wife and mother. Another source of trouble was that she was unable to take God's word simply as it was given, but restlessly tried to beat out a way by which God might immediately fulfil His promise. As God had not given her a child, she wanted Abram to take Hagar, so that a child might be given to Hagar, and Abram weakly yielded to her. Then trouble followed, for Hagar, hoping to be the mother of the long promised son, was carried away

by pride, and began to despise Sarai. This brought out the weakness of both Sarai and Abram. Sarai blamed Abram for the dissension that had arisen between them, and Abram, with a Bedouin's contempt of women's quarrels, bade Sarai deal with Hagar as she pleased. Then misery followed, so that Hagar fled away into the wilderness, preferring to perish there alone rather than to endure any longer the mortification and oppression of her home life.

Appearance of the Angel to Hagar.

Hagar found herself alone in the wilderness, more utterly alone and forsaken than we can easily imagine. She may have belonged to the desert as a child, but how could she find her people? She had left Abram and Sarai, whose duty it was to protect her; she had left the God of Abram and Sarai, and, as far as she knew, was forgotten, and had nothing left her but to lie down and die.

Though Abram would not interfere in the miserable quarrels among the women of his household, the oppression and injustice was known to God. We understand easily that God watches over a great war, that He is conscious of the tyranny of a Napoleon and will in His own time curb and restrain him. We forget that each individual is in the hand of God, and that whatever oppression, unkindness, and slights are unjustly meted out to him, will be known to God. If not even a sparrow falls to the ground unheeded, how could the cruelty of Sarai pass unnoticed by Him? God did not appear to the domineering mistress, but He did appear to comfort and protect the over-burdened servant. He speaks to her by name, "Hagar, Sarai's maid." He further questions her as to whence she came and whither she was going, thus showing an exact knowledge of her circumstances, and of her future and its difficulties. We can imagine the rush of joy that came across the heart of Hagar and her happiness when she found that God was still her God, that she had a place in His love, and that her life was about to be renewed in Him.

Meantime, comes to her as to every other servant of God, both command and promise. She is to return and to

submit herself to Sarai. If Sarai were unjust, then it was she who sinned and would have to give account, but Hagar's duty was that of obedience and of submission. With the command came also the promise that God was giving her a son, and that this son would be under the protection of God. His name would be "Ishmael, God shall hear." God told her that he would be a wild man and his hand against everyone, but that he and his race would endure. This promise was literally fulfilled, for the descendants of Ishmael have always been distinct from all other nations. They have dwelt in the wilderness between Egypt and the Euphrates, roaming the country hither and thither, living by raiding and depredation; never subdued, although armies have been led against them; quarrelling with one another, and all the world; yet free and untrammelled; with characteristics which to this day show their origin; with, as a nation, the deep religious feeling of Abram, but the passionate impulsive spirit of Hagar; ever independent, separate, alone.

"Thou God Seest Me."

Little wonder that awe filled the heart of Hagar and that she willingly obeyed God, who had thus spoken to her. It has been said that there is a fore-gleam of the clearer light of the New Testament in this call of Hagar. It is like the light of love around the Good Shepherd as he leaves the ninety and nine and goes upon the mountains to seek after the one which is lost.

Hagar learned that she had her own separate identity and life with God. This spot would be forever sacred to her as Bethel afterwards was to Jacob. She had been called by name, touched by the love of God. She had discovered the connection between her soul and that of God, and this once found was to her, as it is to every other child of God, the first and greatest thing in her life. When Christ turns and looks upon the soul a new life begins; a life known only to the soul and to God.

Hagar returned home, and when her son was born she called him Ishmael. He grew to be beloved by his father,

and doubtless, owing to his frank and daring character, and also to his position, to be made much of and beloved by his father's followers and dependents. It is possible also that in course of time Abram, almost involuntarily, began to look upon Ishmael as his son and heir.

The Covenant of Circumcision.

It was at this time that God renewed the covenant that He had made with Abram, and confirmed it by a spiritual relationship requiring Abram and all the men of his household to be circumcized, and changed his name from Abram to Abraham, "a father of many nations." Each man in Abraham's household was individually circumcized, a sign that there was a personal covenant between him and God, just as each one of us, as individual Christians are baptized, a sign that we are to take up our Cross and follow Christ.

Abraham's growing desire now took the form of a prayer to God that Ishmael might be recognized as the son who had been promised to him, but not given; but this could not be granted. Sarai, Abraham's wife, would at the right time receive a son, the long promised one. Abraham's anxiety as to Ishmael would find relief, for God had seen and heard her affliction, and His blessing would rest upon her child. He should have many descendants, and become a great nation: a promise which has been and is still being fulfilled. The descendants of Ishmael are a great and powerful nation, dwelling in a land of their own, and, in this respect, are greater than the descendants of Isaac, who, on account of their sin, are still cast out and scattered among the nations.

The Birth of Isaac.

We can imagine the intense rejoicing in the household of Abraham at the birth of Isaac. "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick, but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life" (Proverbs xiii. 12). But whilst others rejoiced the change to Ishmael was very great. He must have grown up feeling himself strong and powerful, beloved of his father, honoured by his dependents, certainly thinking of himself,

and looked upon by others as, the heir to all Abraham's wealth and power. Why should he be supplanted?

It is natural enough to imagine that both Hagar and Ishmael felt bitterly towards Isaac, and that this bitterness reached its climax when the great feast was made at the time when he was weaned, that is to say, when he was recognized, according to the early Eastern custom, as having a separate, independent life and identity of his own. Ishmael probably felt himself superior, not only on account of his age but also on account of his spirit and power.

The whole story of Isaac would lead one to imagine that from childhood up he was of a quiet shrinking disposition, whereas Ishmael was bold, strong and over-bearing. We wonder what attitude Sarai would take towards Hagar and Ishmael in the common home? Would her motherhood give her a tenderness and a forbearance towards Hagar and Ishmael? When Hagar had had a son and Sarai was desolate, it had been natural enough that she should resent the mocking of Hagar, but now, when Sarai had had her heart's desire, when the succession to Abraham was assured to her child, a great wealth of pity and kindness should have sprung up in her; would she not protect and pity her servant, and understand how hard the change in her position was? But Sarai was jealous only for Isaac, and she bade Abraham cast away Hagar from his companionship and following.

The Action of Abraham.

Little wonder that the thing was very grievous to Abraham. He loved his bold, adventurous son. It had been hard enough to send Hagar away before; why need he do it again? But the command of God forced the separation. It seems strange to us that it should have been so, but it was best even for Ishmael. He would grow up a stronger and a braver man if he was apart and had to act for himself, instead of being dependent; and his nature would not be embittered by seeing the preference given to his younger brother. Again, though Abraham did not know it, for the perfect trial of his own faith it was necessary that Ishmael should go. If Abraham had been called upon

to sacrifice Isaac while Ishmael was still in his house, he might have given up the one son and clung to the other : and beside all this, though Abraham could not have known it, there was still another reason.

We often find in Bible history that God had a twofold purpose in the life of His servants. There was first the growth of their own personal life that concerned themselves and God and the world in which they lived. But there was also a second purpose in their lives ; they were figures and signs by which God was foretelling to the men of their own generation, to their successors, and to those in New Testament times, the great story of His redeeming love to man, of His purpose towards man, and of the future relationship between Christ and His Church. Thus in the history of Ishmael and of Isaac there was a type of the future relationship between God and His servants.

Ishmael and Isaac types of the Relationship between God and His Servants.

Until Christ came God gave the Israelites a law : they must do this ; they must not do that. They were slaves to the law and to the command of God, just as Ishmael, the son of a slave, was a slave, although he was in his father's house. After Christ came and died for men the relationship was no longer that of a slave but of a son. We are God's children, with the freedom of children, not with the spirit of servants or of slaves. This does not mean that we are not called upon to obey the will of God. We are far more bound to obey, but we do all with the glad obedience of a son, with the love and zeal of a child, not with the grudging spirit of a servant. Thus Isaac would obey his father with his whole love, a love so whole-hearted, and so trustful, that he was prepared even to let his father kill him. This thought is very fully worked out by St. Paul ; in these far-away ages, when Abraham, sorely against his will, cast out Ishmael, though he little knew it, a picture and object lesson was given, not only to him but to all who came after him, of the future relationship which one day would exist between God and His Church.

It foreshadowed that those who inherited the promise were to be children, not of the slave, but of the free.

The Departure of Hagar and Ishmael.

Meantime, in its bitterness the parting had to take place. Whenever Abraham had to obey any command of God that was especially grievous to him, he got up early to do it. Binding the bottle of water and the bread upon the shoulder of Hagar and upon the child with his own hand, the last act of kindness or care that he could do for them, he sent them away. He knew only too well the fate that might overtake them in the wilderness, but probably trusted that God, who had commanded that she should go, and who had protected Hagar before, would protect her again. But to Hagar, as she went, there was no light. The water was spent in her bottle. It was hard enough to perish herself in the wilderness ; it was far harder to see her child die. But her cry of misery, as well as that of her child, had entered into the ear of God, and with the cry the help came ; the refreshment that was needed was provided, and the promise of future protection and of future greatness given.

What is told us afterwards of Ishmael's life is of great interest. God was with him and protected him ; he became strong and powerful. There was no further union with the house of Abraham, for his mother took him a wife from Egypt, thus marking his entire separation from the seed of Abraham. One last gleam of brightness came with the reunion of the brothers, for we read later on that Abraham gave gifts to the descendants of Hagar, and that both Ishmael and Isaac were together after his death, and stood beside his grave and buried him.

The whole story is strange and sad, but it has its own lesson. All our home life is open and manifest to the eye of Him, with whom we have to do; His protection and care are over the oppressed and weak even more than over the strong ; whatever the daily fret and oppression may be, everything both small and great is moving forward according to the providence of God and the ultimate working out of His plan for each child of His care.

LESSON X.

GENESIS XVIII.—XIX. 12-29.

THE AFTERMATH OF LOT'S CHOICE.

The Well-watered Plain of Jordan.

Twenty years had passed since Lot had made his great choice, and had sought wealth and ease in Sodom ; fifteen years since he had had his great warning, and had been rescued by Abraham only to turn back again ; fifteen years since, at the same time, God had made his great covenant with Abraham, and had again promised a son whose descendants should one day be as the stars of the sky in multitude. The time had passed, but as yet there was no great change in the life either of Abraham or of Lot. Lot was prosperous, and was now settled in the city of Sodom itself, and although his soul was vexed with the filthy conversation of those around him, it was not so much vexed as to make him willing to surrender his position and wealth and leave the city as a protest against sin. But God's purposes, though long delayed, work themselves out only the more surely, and the eighteenth chapter gives the account of the visit of the angels to Abraham and to Lot.

Faith and Sight.

As we contrast the dealing of the angels with Abraham and with Lot, we see the contrast in spiritual growth which had taken place in the lives of the two men. Abraham had lived a life of faith ; that is to say, he had put the unseen before the seen, and wherever the service of

God conflicted with his worldly prosperity, had placed that service first. The more he lived with the unseen the greater became his interest in the things of righteousness and of the Kingdom of God, so that when God purposed to overthrow Sodom, He made known His purpose to Abraham. Abraham has been called the friend of God, for God talked with Abraham as a man talks with his friend. The account is thus given. Abraham was a great chief, and must by this time have had a very numerous household, for fifteen years ago, as we know, he had summoned together three hundred and eighteen of his own armed men when he went out to rescue Lot. Yet great chieftain as he was, when three strangers are seen to be approaching his tent he comes out to meet them, welcomes them, gives direction for their food and refreshment, and himself selects a calf to be dressed for them, and bids Sarah make ready cakes upon the hearth. This personal solicitude and assistance is true hospitality, and is according to the New Testament spirit. "Use hospitality one to one another without grudging." "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." "I was a stranger and ye took me in." The last two promises being literally fulfilled in this instance.

The Laughter of Joy and of Unbelief.

The angel tells Abraham that the promise given twenty years before is now about to be fulfilled. As he speaks, Abraham recognizes that it is God speaking to him. His soul has learnt to know the voice of God, and has learnt also that that voice is truth. But Sarah has not thus learnt to know the voice of God and to trust God, and when she hears the promise she looks not at the word of God, but at what she considers the impossibility of its fulfilment, and she laughs, as the Scripture puts it, within herself, and this laugh of Sarah's marks out the attitude of unbelief as contrasted with the quiet confidence of belief. The laugh was within herself, but it was known and reproved by the angel. Sarah was startled; she denied having laughed, but was convicted. When Abraham was told that he would receive

a son, he laughed for joy. He had faith, that is to say, God's promise was to him practically the same as the actual reception of the gift itself. When Sarah heard that a son would be given, she laughed, not because she was not eager to receive the son, but because there was a rising of unbelief within her, for the promise of God was to her no rock of assurance on which she could found her faith. In the contrast thus given we have worked out very simply the difference in attitude between faith and unbelief. If the Word of God assuring us of our present salvation and our future inheritance brings to us a gladness of rejoicing because it is a fact which cannot be taken away or changed, and if in consequence we frame our whole life according to that assurance, then we have faith ; but if God's promise for the life here and hereafter is always subordinate to and tempered by our own condition and the difficulties around us, then faith is not triumphant over unbelief. We may hear and think the promises of God are good, but stronger than the promise is the rising of unbelief within us. We walk by sight and not by faith.

The Friend of God.

The angels then passed on towards Sodom, and Abraham went with them to bring them on their way. As he went they told him of the judgment about to fall upon Sodom, and they told him why God's dealings were revealed to him. He is trusted because he fears God, and because he teaches his children and his household to do justice and judgment. Abraham's outlook is far wider than that of any of the men around him. He has been living with God, and the concerns of the kingdom of God are very real to him, and he can thus enter into what God is about to do. The cry of the sin has gone up to Heaven, and if the sin is really as grievous and as great as that cry, then heavy judgment must fall. God will arise and will know, and according as He finds will do. Alas ! Abraham knows how terrible that finding of God will be. Fifteen years ago he had been brought into contact with Sodom and with its sin, and it had been such that even then he would not take

from the king of Sodom so much as a shoe latchet. What will it be now with the growth of time and of opportunity?

The Overhanging Sword.

As the angels passed on, Abraham stood still before God, and there came a solemn pause whilst the doomed city lay unconscious, awaiting its doom below. Then came the whole outpouring of Abraham's soul in prayer to God. He pleads with God as a man pleads for the life of his friend. But as he pleads you see that even Abraham does not realize to how terrible an extent the wickedness of Sodom has grown, for he asks that if there be fifty, forty-five, forty, thirty, even twenty, ten, the city may be spared. Abraham, with his large and God-fearing household, would naturally suppose that there would be at least ten righteous men within the city of Sodom. Lot had been living there for many years. If he had not gathered around him a band like that of Abraham, surely in his own household, and among his immediate followers, he would have had at least ten righteous men. Some have thought that Abraham should have persevered further, but his prayer was granted, he returned and went to his place.

The Three Lessons.

As we read the story, three great lessons stand out. First, we see what real prayer is. It is no mere recitation of a form, with the thought far away ; it is the pouring out of the whole soul to its uttermost depth, even though by thus pouring it out anger may be aroused. This is "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availing much." It is the arousing of the whole soul to avert an impending calamity ; an arousing kindred to that by which Abraham had called together his armed men, and had rescued Lot and his companions from Chedorlaomer. Secondly, from the cry of the city which went up to Heaven we see that though grievous sin may be committed, and no one seems to know or to care about it, yet it cries out to Heaven as certainly as the cry of Abel's blood ascended up to God. We see, too, that when that sum of iniquity is full the cry

will be heard, the sin looked into, and God's judgment fall. The third lesson comes from the question of the ten righteous men that might have been found in the city of Sodom. We do not realize the value to any country or city of the men in it who fear God. They are probably quiet, and little heeded or thought of, but they are the salt which preserves the place, either by their presence rebuking and restraining sin, or by their prayer, which turns away the judgment of God from falling upon the city. God could have spared Sodom had there been ten righteous whose prayer and influence might have turned it back to God.

The Day of Visitation.

Meantime, the angels passed on their way. They visited Sodom, and found the sin to be such that destruction must instantly overtake it. The prayer of Abraham cannot be answered according to his petition, but it will be answered in God's way. There are not ten righteous men in the city, but Lot and those belonging to him will be warned and will escape. It is true that Sodom was situated among the slime pits, and therefore liable at any time to an eruption of inflammable gas and bituminous matter and thick soft mud, yet at daybreak it must have appeared as joyous, as wealthy, and as far from catastrophe as on any other day. Lot had overnight implored his sons-in-law to leave the city, but they had only mocked him. How could he expect his words to have any effect? He had constantly protested against sin, and yet for the sake of wealth had lived in the midst of it, and in many respects been one with it. Men listen to and take account of a protest when they see that it is the ruling force of a man's life. They will take no heed to a mere opinion or dogma. After all it is only life that touches life, and it is only the conviction of what we are living out in our own lives which influences and really affects those around us. Lot's words must have seemed like one of his former protests, although in this particular instance he was about to act upon his convictions. When the morning came, he and his wife and

daughters, alone and reluctantly, forced forward by the hand of the angels, the Lord being merciful, were brought out of the city, and told that they must escape for their lives to the mountains lest they be consumed.

A Good Man's Faith and Prayer.

It is easy to see the contrast between the faith of Abraham and the unbelief of Lot. Abraham, far away in the mountains, believed that Sodom would be overthrown, and believed it so intensely that he poured out his whole soul in prayer to God for it, until he feared that by his very intensity he might further arouse the anger of God ; and the unbelief of Lot, who could not believe that the city would be overthrown. He loved his wealth, and it loomed up so largely before his eyes that he could not get beyond it, but lingered on in the heart of the doomed city. Again we get the contrast between Abraham and Lot in the matter of prayer. Abraham pleaded most earnestly for Lot and for Sodom, although Lot had seized an opportunity by which he could take advantage of the generosity of Abraham, and although the men of Sodom were bound to Abraham by no ties of friendship or business. Lot, on the other hand, had not one thought for all those with whom he had been living, and to whom he must have been bound by so many ties of business and friendship. His one prayer was that instead of going so far as to the mountains, he might be allowed to escape into a city near by. He asked that the city might be spared for his sake. He did not seem to think of praying for the city for its own sake, and so the selfishness of his daily life came out at this crisis of his life, but despite his selfishness his prayer was granted and the city saved. Meantime, the sun had risen upon the earth ; but Lot's wife turned back and lingered so long that, although the destruction did not begin until Lot had entered into Zoar, she was entangled in the overthrow, and when the fire and salt rained upon Sodom, she became coated with the thick saline mud which probably came up in eruption from the bituminous pits all around. Her name is not given, but Christ bids us "remember Lot's

wife." She stands as a monument of the danger of relapse ; a warning to those who have set out from the city of destruction but in heart turned back again to it.

The Angel of Judgment.

Abraham's heart yearned over Sodom, and he got up early in the morning to learn its fate. With what sad foreboding he must have hurried forward to the place where he had stood before the Lord, but, early as he was, the judgment had already fallen. The smoke of the plain went up as the smoke of a furnace. The cry of the sin had gone up to God, and God had visited it with utter destruction, for such a city could only be a plague-spot, a source of incessant evil to the world around. There was no hope of reform in it, no body of good men who, by their life and example, might have turned the city from sin to righteousness. Therefore Sodom, like the cities of Canaan in the time of Joshua, for the sake of the rest of the world, had to be swept away. But in the midst of the destruction Abraham's prayer was answered and Lot saved.

The Trend of a Man's Life.

The great lesson is that we cannot serve God and mammon. Whatever we put first day by day will grow into the mainspring, the habit, the spirit of our lives ; in fact will become our very life, and this was the summing up of Lot's history. He had loved the world and had chosen it, thinking he could keep himself unspotted from the world at the same time. What was the outcome of it all ? He had not influenced one of his townsmen for lasting good, his children, or his wife. She buried in the overthrow was left, a tower of warning to all the inhabitants of that district, and a warning in the pages of scripture to the whole world, even to us of to-day. He could not avert the judgment of God from the city where he dwelt—his history is left on the pages of Genesis with a ring of warning even more terrible in one way than the history of his wife, for he had had the advantage of the knowledge

of God, as well as kinship and intercourse with one who was called the friend of God. Lot, as we last read of him in Scripture, stands stripped, miserable, alone, with nothing but the ruin of the town and his family around him, a monument of the outcome of the life of a man who, by his own free will, has placed himself in the midst of temptation, and is saved "yet so as by fire."

LESSON XI.

GENESIS XXII.

"THE SUPREME TEST."

A Foreshadowing of the Cross.

God had fulfilled His promise to Abraham. After weary years of waiting, each year making it harder and apparently more impossible for God's word to be fulfilled, a son Isaac, "laughter or rejoicing," was born. He was called Isaac because Abraham knew that in him was bound up the future hope not only of his own house, but also of the world, for, through his descendants the will of God would be made known ; and from his seed would come the Saviour of the world.

Then across all the joy and brightness came the command of God to Abraham, to take his son, and to offer him up for a burnt offering. It was a darkness as sudden as that which overwhelmed the world when Christ, who seemed so necessary to enlighten and to teach it, was crucified. In the placing of Isaac upon the altar we see foreshadowed the sacrifice of the Son of God ; we see foreshadowed also Christ's spirit of self-sacrifice, His readiness to do the will of God.

"The Lord Stood by Me."

The story of Isaac upon Mount Moriah is one which peculiarly attracts us when we are children, and continues to attract us as we grow older, for we can read into it something of our own spiritual experience. Like many other parts of God's Word it grows in meaning. It mirrors not only our

past experience, but also that which is still ahead of us, deeper than our own. It is the unfolding of this revelation which, in its true sense, makes life worth living. Abraham's life was worth living, for, at each sharp turn of the road, he saw opening out before him a clearer view of the love and power of God. At this, the sharpest turn of all, there was revealed to him a far-off view, whether he understood it or not, of Christ's death for him, the substitution of Christ's life for his. There came to him, at the same time, a more perfect understanding of God, the support of the Everlasting Arms. Such flashes of light, of hope, and meaning in life, as they come, give to the advanced Christian courage to go forward. It is this fuller understanding which illuminates old age; the gradual decay of the body being more than compensated for by the opening out of the spiritual vista of the soul.

The Three Lessons of Substitution, Sacrifice, and Faith.

After reading the chapter over, and trying to realize the story of the sacrifice, it is well to stop before going further, and to ask what was the meaning of it all. What can we trace of God's great purpose in it? We can see the great shadow pictures, the gift of God's Son, the willingness of God's Son to die, the substitution of a sin offering in the form of a ram caught by the horns. We can read more meaning into it as we realize that it took place probably on the very spot on which the Temple was afterwards built, and where, year by year, the priests sacrificed the sin offering, until, almost on that very spot, Christ Himself suffered once for all.

There is another lesson which stands out even more distinctly, and which answers the question as to what true faith and worship is. We find a surrender of Abraham's will to God, a sacrifice of the joy of his whole life, a sacrifice of what was even more than life itself, for, in slaying Isaac, he was giving up not only his son, but the future of the very Kingdom of God. He seemed to be contradicting the foretold will of God. For this supreme act of Faith, he was

called the Father of the Faithful. A man shows true faith when he gives up not only father and mother at the call of God, but is willing, when seeking and working for what he believes to be for the furtherance of religion, and for the furtherance of the knowledge and love of God in the world, to submit his will to the will of God, to be content to work in God's way even though that way at the time may seem to be contrary to the present welfare of the Church.

Abraham has a special lesson for those who have already borne the burden and the heat of the day. As the years go on, the life of faith is one of ever sharpened trial. It is a warfare in which there is no discharge. Abraham at the call of God had left his own country. He had lived all his life in tents, moving from place to place. He had sacrificed again and again his worldly prosperity, as in the case of Lot. He had, at the command of God, sent away Ishmael, whom he dearly loved ; indeed, we are told that the thing was very grievous to him. Yet now, in his old age, he comes to the supreme test of his life. Truly the Christian cannot lay aside his armour, his is a warfare in which there is no discharge until the final one shall come.

The Testing of Youth, as well as Old Age.

Isaac also was tested. We are apt in looking at the sorrow of Abraham to overlook the pain and sorrow of Isaac, and how hard it was for him to lay down his life when it was at its fullest. He had been taught from his childhood up that his life was of importance, not only to himself, but also to the world ; why should he lay it down ? Why should he surrender what was so precious not only to him, but also to the whole world ? If Abraham's is the sacrifice of old age, Isaac's is the ever-harder sacrifice of youth. The sacrifice of the deepest affection and religious hope, on the one hand ; on the other, of full life, of ambition and religious hope, with no years of trust and dependence to sustain him. For behind Abraham was his steadfast trust that God would raise Isaac from the dead, as we find in the Hebrews ; but how could that hope have been present to or of strength to Isaac ? So, to sum up,

the story is the foreshadowing of the miracle of God's love and purpose to the world ; it is an example of what true faith is in God's sight, the faith of the tried Christian in old age, the faith of the young man entering on life with all its possibilities.

The story divides itself under three heads :

- I. The Trial.
- II. Abraham's Conquest over that Trial.
- III. The Reward.

The Trial.

It is well here to distinguish between the words "tempt" and "prove." Tempt means an appeal to the lower part of our nature with the chance of our yielding ; prove, which is meant here, is an appeal to the higher part of our nature, hoping we may resist, and by resisting grow stronger and learn more of God. Satan tempts with the hope that we may yield ; God tempts or proves to strengthen and to purify.

Then as to the trial. It sounds stranger to us than it probably did to Abraham. We must remember that Abraham dwelt among idolators. To them human sacrifice was a common act of worship ; the greatest evidence of their religious devotion to their idols was the sacrifice of human life to appease them ; and the highest sacrifice of all was shown when a father sacrificed his son. God's call to Abraham was not to do more than any of the heathen nations would have done at the call of their idol. Only to Abraham there was the strangeness of it all, because of his knowledge of God and of His purpose towards his son. According to traditions which must have come down to him, human life was sacred, although that sacredness was never fully taught until this lesson. Faith is following God in the dark, and Abraham followed in a darkness which could be felt.

Abraham's Conquest over Trial.

The nobility of Abraham's character came out not only in his obedience, but also in the quiet calm with which he went through the ordeal that lay before him. He did not

try to evade the blow by letting circumstances come in his way and prevent him from carrying out God's will ; thus, he does not seem to have told Sarah what he was about to do. It might have been impossible for him to withstand her prayers and entreaties ; he might not have had the strength to bring so heavy a blow upon her ; also his mother's tears would greatly have intensified the trial to Isaac.

He rose up early in the morning, and, although he allowed the young men to accompany him, he would not let them go up the mountain with him. Had they accompanied him to the top of the hill, they might have tried to stop him by force, or might have tried to dissuade Isaac. He did not even tell Isaac till the last moment. It needed the most silent, stern following of duty if he were to keep himself ready for the command of God. The pathos of the whole scene is indescribable, and it rings out in every word. "They went both of them together." This is one of those instances of companionship in which we walk beside those nearest and dearest to us, but with a whole gulf of tragedy lying between.

How did Abraham steady his voice to answer Isaac ? What were his emotions when he lifted up his eyes and saw the place afar off ? What, when he saw the manhood of his son, his willingness to fulfil the will of God ?

One touching thing we notice : although he had command over so many slaves, he did everything with his own hands. When he rose early in the morning he saddled his ass and clave the wood for the burnt offering. Every last act for the son of his love, even though each one wrung his heart, was done by his own hand.

The Reward.

God's eye marked it all. Abraham's obedience to God had shone out as a star in the dark night of heathendom all around, to shine on, with clearer lustre, even when the light of Christ had called multitudes to faith in Him ; and God's fuller blessing was to descend. For all time, there was the example of Divine help in extremity ; for all time it was taught that human sacrifice was abhorrent to God, but

that the sacrifice required was the surrender of the will. "In burnt offerings and sacrifice for sin, Thou hast had no pleasure. Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God."

Isaac returned to Abraham with the beauty of God upon him, with the promise that sin through his seed should be overthrown. "Thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies." And Abraham must have been drawn closer to God by the knowledge that the pain of every step of his surrender had been known, and that he had been enabled to give his all to the God who had watched over him and made His presence known to him all his days.

"That Shineth More and More unto the Perfect Day."

There was a further reward of which Abraham knew nothing, but one which, could he have understood and realized it, would have filled his heart with gladness. His story has been a beacon light of hope and joy to Christians of all ages. He was permitted to translate some of the greatest revelations of God's love to man, and to give them as a beacon of hope to the world, one simple enough for the youngest child to understand, one full of the deepest meaning to the advanced Christian. We realize the love of Abraham for Isaac at the supreme moment when he is about to sacrifice him, and we catch from it a glimpse of the love of God when He "so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." Again, as we think of Isaac being bound and laid upon the altar, we seem to hear the words: "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God." Lastly, in the substitution of the ram for Isaac, we have a simple rendering of another truth which in itself is so hard to understand: the substitution of a life for a life; that truth which came out more clearly in the sacrifice of the Passover Lamb, until it reached its consummation in the death of Christ. Abraham did not understand more than the very beginning of what these figures and truths meant. We cannot see God, but we do see Jesus in these outskirts of His glory and love, and each revelation as it comes down the ages is of exceeding preciousness to us.

LESSON XII.

GENESIS XXIII.

THE CAVE OF MACHPELAH.

The Quiet Sojourning of Strong Men.

Abraham had sojourned peacefully for many years in the land of Canaan. When we consider the great wealth and the large household of retainers which Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob possessed, we wonder how men so wealthy and powerful lived in an unsettled country like Canaan without war or serious quarrel. The answer may be found partly in the fact that they were under the direct protection of God, and sojourned there at his command; partly also in the character of the men themselves. Abraham was strong and generous, would freely give, and would receive nothing that would put him under obligation to anyone around him. Isaac suffered injustice and gave up his rights, especially in the case of the wells which he had dug again and again, moving quietly forward to some place in which he could live in peace. Jacob spent the greater part of his life with Laban, and did not return to Canaan until his character had been purified and ennobled, and the meanness which might have been a snare to him, and have led him into conflict with his neighbours, in large measure conquered. When his family multiplied and became a tribe, they left Canaan and dwelt in Egypt until they were ready to come forth as a conquering nation.

The Burial of Sarah.

An illustration of Abraham's generosity and nobility of character in dealing with those around him is given in this chapter of Genesis. Sarah had died in Kirjath-arba and it was the time of mourning for her. Abraham, in accordance with God's will had no land of his own. He was a stranger and a sojourner, and had been content to be so, but now it was necessary that he should purchase a burying place for Sarah. This was the time in which the jealousy of the inhabitants of the country might have manifested itself. They might have thought it dangerous to allow so powerful a man to gain possession of any of their land, and thus to acquire a right to settle permanently among them. But the story of the negotiations and purchase of the burial place from Ephron the Hittite, shows the consideration and honour in which Abraham was held. According to Eastern custom, great professions of friendship and generosity were made. Abraham might have the choice of all the sepulchres of the land, or Ephron would give him, as a gift, the land in which to bury his dead. But Abraham refused. He, whose hand had done everything for Isaac on the day when he thought that he must part with him, would not allow anything to be done for the burial of Sarah save by himself. Apart from the question of maintaining the position of honour and dignity that he held among the people of the land, he paid the full price that was asked, and weighed out the silver in the audience of the sons of Heth, and thus, the first purchase of land was made, the earnest of the future inheritance.

The Cave of Machpelah.

No spot in the land of Canaan connected with Old Testament history could ever have the interest and association of this cave of Machpelah. It was to this that Jacob looked back when he was dying: "Bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite. In the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite

for a possession of a burying-place. There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah" (Gen. lix. 29-31).

It may be called the centre of the Jewish nation, and no one, either Christian or Jew, could stand by it without feeling that he also had a right of possession in it, for those who lie buried there belong to the world, as well as to the Jewish nation. The story of their lives has been ours from our earliest days. They are our ancestors in the faith, and their seed has purchased an inheritance for us, and yet, that spot where they are buried is inaccessible to either Jew or Christian. It has for centuries been in possession of the Turks, and it is said that only six men who are not Mohammedans have even gazed on the outside building which covers the tomb. The tomb and whatever it now contains is shrouded in mystery.

A Prince of God.

There is one special point of interest in the chapter, and that is the reverence with which Abraham is treated. He is spoken of as a mighty prince, or, more literally, a prince of God. Like Melchizedek, all men recognized in him the power of the Unseen and of the Divine, and acknowledged that he belonged to the sons of God.

LESSON XIII.

GENESIS XXIV.

THE IDYLL OF A JEWISH HOME.

The Weakness of Sarah.

The death of Sarah had left the house of Abraham desolate. There was great mourning for her, although she does not stand out in Scripture for nobility or strength of character. She seems to have increased instead of lessening Abraham's difficulties, yet he loved her passionately, as did her son Isaac, for it was not until the coming of Rebekah that Isaac was comforted for the loss of his mother.

Certain women are gifted by God with great power of winning affection and of keeping it. This gift may come from beauty, as in Sarah's case, or may be due to charm of manner. No two women in Old Testament history were more gifted in this way than Sarah and Rebekah, and yet each might have used her influence more wisely. Still at Sarah's death the house was desolate, and it became more than ever Abraham's duty to seek a wife for Isaac.

Perhaps up to this time Abraham had delayed doing so for two reasons. In the first place it would have been difficult for a young wife to live with so imperious and jealous a woman as her mother-in-law, Sarah. And secondly, it was difficult to find a wife of the same family and religion as Isaac. But now for every reason the matter could no longer be delayed, and a wife had to be procured for Isaac.

The sending of Eliezer for Rebekah.

Far away, near the Euphrates, was the little town of Haran, the home of the family of Abraham. Terah had started out to go to the Promised Land, but had been discouraged and stopped by the way. He called the place where he settled Ur after his youngest son who had just died there, but his family still lived there, and it was to Ur that Abraham decided to send for a wife for Isaac.

The custom was for the father to choose a wife for his son, but in this case it was especially difficult. Abraham had left the country of Mesopotamia at the command of God, and unless that command was annulled neither he nor his son could go back, for they were called to remain and sojourn in the Land of Promise. Therefore, the task which Abraham could not accomplish was entrusted to his servant Eliezer.

One of the beautiful characteristics of the heroes of the Old Testament was the love which existed between them and their servants, as in the case of Naaman or David. Abraham's servant, Eliezer, had a living faith in God as well as unbounded devotion to his master, "All the goods of his master were in his hands." He was willing to undertake this most difficult and delicate task, although we see how greatly he felt the responsibility. This is shown in the difficulty which he foresees, he fears that the maid who is chosen may not be willing to follow him, and, if so, he asks may Isaac himself go and fetch her? But under no circumstances is Isaac to return. God, who has called Isaac to be separate and to serve Him, will not only give him a wife, but will give him one who will raise up children in a like fear of God. "Beware, that thou bring not my son thither again," sounds like the answer of the three children to Nebuchadnessar. "Our God whom we serve is able to preserve us, but if not we will not."

The Choice of Rebekah.

The picture of the servant kneeling in prayer to God by the well is very beautiful, as also the request which he makes. He asks God for a sign, a sign rather than a token, that he may find a damsel who by her beauty, willingness,

and kind-heartedness shows that she is the right wife for Isaac. One who will not grudge trouble, but will give water to the camels as well as to him ; he hopes that the sight of the animals, dust-stained and weary, may rouse in her the impulse to help, and to help gladly. The prayer is answered almost before he has done speaking. Rebekah gives all that is asked, and more, she hastens, and one can almost see the bright, willing girl, anxious to show hospitality and to relieve the weariness of man and beast.

Eliezer watches her in silent awe, and then gives her the presents which he has brought with him. You seem to hear her ingenuous answer, her offer of hospitality, the wonder with which she listens to Eliezer as he praises God ; and she learns from his prayer that she has been ministering to a servant of her wealthy relative Abraham, and that in showing kindness she has been connecting herself with the God of Abraham also. You can almost hear her footsteps as she hastens to run and tell the wonderful tidings to her mother.

The Bible tells us that she was very fair to look upon. The gift of beauty, like any other of God's gifts, comes directly from Him, and the Bible speaks of it very simply. It is a gift to be recognized when given, and to be used in God's service and for the happiness of others.

The Betrothal of Rebekah.

The story is all so naturally told ; we see the shrewdness of her brother Laban as he recognizes from her earrings and her bracelets the wealth and position of the stranger. He is as keen in welcoming Eliezer as Rebekah, only there seems to be underlying his welcome more of the appreciation of the wealth of Abraham than of the God-given importance of the mission of Eliezer.

Eliezer, before he accepts the hospitality, tells his errand, thus showing the same scrupulous exactness and honour which Abraham had always shown in his dealings with others, as for instance when he gave Lot the choice of the land ; when he would not accept the spoil of Sodom ; when he refused to accept the gift of Machpelah ; when he paid the fullest price which Ephron placed upon the land. All

this is reflected in Eliezer who will not touch the food put before him until he has told the mission of his master and of God and discharged his duty.

He puts the question directly, will they deal kindly and truly with his master; will they obey the leading of God; or must he depart? There is a hush, and the fear of God falls again upon Abraham's old home as Laban and Bethuel yield to the voice of God and Rebekah is given her choice. Upon Rebekah also there seems to come a feeling of awe and of reverence, and the thought that she has been chosen by God makes her willing to leave her country and her own people without hesitation. She quietly says that she will go.

But before Eliezer brings forth the presents that have been provided we notice that he worships God and bows himself to the earth. His whole errand has been begun, continued, and ended in God. And now he will lose no time, as soon as it is morning he asks to go. One of the beautiful touches is the way in which Rebekah yields to his request. She was but a young girl, she was going forth to a husband and to a home she had never seen. She might naturally have wanted to cling for a few days to her dear ones, to be made much of by her people, to talk over her future and her great fortune, but the whole story reads as though overpowering the romance of the call, and the impetuosity of her character, was a sense of awe and of reverence. The hand of God had sought her out, she will at once obey His guidance. Her words are simple: "I will go," and so with the blessing of Laban and Bethuel she sets out on the journey, accompanied by her nurse Deborah.

The Meeting of Rebekah and Isaac.

As beautiful as the starting out of Rebekah is the waiting of Isaac. There is a hush of reverence and awe in him also. He has gone out alone to meditate with God in the field at eventide, and in the presence of the God, to whom he has been speaking, he meets his future wife. There is a beautiful touch in Rebekah's character also. When she has been told by the servant who it is who is in the field coming

to meet her, she alights off her camel and takes a veil and covers herself. The gentle modesty of the girl comes out despite the vivacity and impetuosity of her character.

A God-given love grows up between her and her husband. Isaac was naturally quiet, thoughtful and of a gentle and retiring nature, Rebekah was a wife peculiarly suited to his character; serving the same God, but naturally of a totally different disposition, a woman of quick sympathy, generous, vivacious, active, she filled up the cup of happiness for Isaac and Abraham.

Lessons.

Many lessons stand out as we read this story. There is first the high ideal of marriage. If Abraham held that it was of first importance that Isaac should marry a wife who feared God, ought not Christians to be equally careful in this matter? Isaac must have had many an inward struggle before he could leave the choice of his wife to Eliezer instead of choosing for himself one of the inhabitants of the land. St. Paul says: "Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers." True happiness can only be where there is true union, that is to say, where husband and wife are at one, not only in communion with one another, but in communion with the Unseen.

Secondly. We have examples of what the power of prayer may be. We have first the prayer of Eliezer, who lays his need in its fulness before God. "Pour out your souls before Him." He tells his difficulty and asks for definite answer and for clear guidance at each step of his way. This is an example of an effectual fervent prayer which avails much.

Then there is the even higher type of meditative prayer. Isaac communes with God in the stillness of the evening. This is the uplifting of the soul in adoration, the dwelling in the secret place of the Most High, the passing into the courts of Heaven.

Thirdly. We get in Eliezer a high ideal of unselfishness. Eliezer was the elder of Abraham's household, and if Isaac had not been born he was the chosen heir of all

Abraham's wealth, and yet where can we find an example of deeper love or more faithful and unselfish service than that of Eliezer for Abraham and Isaac. He served his master with all the powers of his heart as well as of his mind, and prayed for him as intensely as if he had been praying for his own son.

LESSON XIV.

GENESIS XXVII.

THE GREAT EXCHANGE.

The Man of Peace.

Many years had passed since Rebekah had left her home and married Isaac, it has generally been thought that their life was peaceful and happy.

Abraham had died, and had been buried by his sons Isaac and Ishmael in the cave of Machpelah. Isaac lived in peace. There was trouble, from time to time, between his herdsmen and those of his neighbours, but he was always willing to yield his wealth for the sake of peace, and to forfeit his rights rather than to cause discord by striving for them. Isaac was tried in the same way that Abraham had been before him, and for very many years both he and Rebekah were childless. At last two sons were born, Esau and Jacob, and at their birth it was clearly foretold, that the elder should serve the younger, that is to say, that the headship of the family, one might almost say the priesthood, would rest upon Jacob, and not upon Esau.

The Contrast between Esau and Jacob.

As the boys grew up, and their characters developed, it would have been hard to find any two lads more unlike one another. Esau had naturally by far the more attractive nature. He was frank, impulsive, generous, passionate, the kind of man who is universally a favourite,

and whose faults are overlooked because they are less obvious, and yet he was selfish, inconstant, living from hand to mouth, incapable of persevering work, caring nothing for duty or for God. Jacob, by the side of Esau, seems a far less attractive character ; he was mean, scheming, and ready to take advantage of others. His faults lay on the surface, but nevertheless underneath there was the possibility of a great character. He was strong, with a marvellous power of endurance, able to see what was best in life, and willing to wait and to strive for it. He was also capable of very deep affection. He served fourteen years for his wife, and they seemed to him but a day, "for the love that he had unto her." This love continued strong and unchangeable, despite her weakness and selfishness, and continued to be the one passion of his life, even after her death, for in his latter years and when dying his thoughts still turned to her. Above all, Jacob realized that there was a God, and desired to be in relation with Him. It is true that for many years, owing to the power of his sin, that relationship was a far-off one, yet at the close of his life, we find him very near to God.

Jacob's story is full of encouragement to all, for it shows the change that came over him through the power of God, and we realize from the gradual unfolding of his life, what the grace of God can make, even out of a mean man.

The Question of the Birthright.

As the brothers grew up their characters came out. Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field, his frank, careless, sensuous nature, reckless of consequences, naturally enjoyed the excitement of a hunter's life. This recklessness reached its culminating point in the sale of the birthright, and in his marriage. The birthright meant more than we understand now by primogeniture, or what we call the right of entail. In the East it carried with it the headship of the tribe, the priesthood and the leadership of the family. This birthright, or, as we might call it, this dowry from God was Esau's by right, because he was the eldest son, although the old prophecy stood recorded against him, that the elder should

serve the younger. Probably Esau thought little, and cared little, about it; he had by his carelessness let the place of the elder son pass to Jacob, and Jacob, quietly pushing forward his way, had been ready to take advantage of every opening given. A great crisis in life is almost always the outcome of a long train of events leading up to it. Had Esau always recognized his duty to God, and his duty as the eldest son of the family, Jacob would never have thought of making such a proposal to him as the sale of his birthright, and Esau would have spurned the first suggestion of it.

"A Mess of Pottage."

The Bible dispassionately gives the account of what passed between the two brothers, pausing neither to praise nor to blame. Esau was returning from hunting, when he found Jacob seething some red pottage, and his passionate, pleasure-loving nature came to the front, he cried: "Let me gulp down that red stuff." Jacob, cool and calculating, saw his advantage, and demanded the birthright in return for it. Esau said, "I am at the point to die, and what profit shall this birthright do to me?" He was not at the point of death, but he exaggerated his need as we often do, when we want to extenuate our sin, then after a short enjoyment, he went his large, careless way. Would that he had been the first and the last, whether of nations or of individuals, who has sold his birthright for a mess of pottage! We are so apt to forget and to play lightly with the great gifts of God, which have come freely to us, and which cost us nothing, our health, our character, our time, yea, even our souls. We let go the birthrights which have been bought back to us at great cost, our purity of worship, our Sundays; and we do this, not usually by one open bargain, as in the present case, but by our long carelessness, by seizing our momentary pleasure, or by putting aside the thought of duty. The words of Christ need to ring again and again in our ears: "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul." Esau probably thought little and cared little about what he had done. He may have laughed over it, and contrasted the open generosity

of his character with the meanness of Jacob. Certainly there was no change in him, for we find that he married two daughters of Canaan, who, we are told, were a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah. Many years passed before he realized what he had done.

A House Divided against a House.

The account is given very vividly in the Bible. It is one of those sad stories touching the inner working of family life. We see laid bare the schemes of the one against the other. We find that saddest of all things, a family divided against itself. Isaac, always quiet and peace-loving, seems to have been attracted by the frankness and daring of Esau, and to have openly shown his preference for his elder son. Rebekah, quick, open-hearted, impulsive, naturally turned to the son whose character was the greatest contrast to her own, the patient, quiet, reasonable Jacob. As we read the story, we see much more than lies on the surface, we seem to see Isaac, impatient and suspicious of Rebekah and Jacob, probably because he had accurately gauged the weakness and the character of his younger son, and found that he could not trust him. Probably also Rebekah had managed Isaac, again and again, until he had learnt to distrust her; but, disliking strife, he had allowed her to have her own way, although he chafed under her hand, and chafed so heavily that for once he was determined to put her on one side, and to carry through his own will. This seems to be the most probable explanation, otherwise we cannot understand his actions. He must have known what the prophecy of God was as to his two sons; he must have seen that Esau had not the character which ought to inherit the blessing; and yet he was determined to give it to him.

The Wrongdoing of Isaac and Esau.

Esau seems to have had a rough affection for his father. He had ministered to his wants, and, from time to time, given him the food that he craved. But now Isaac determines that, despite what had been prophesied Esau is the eldest son, and he will give him the blessing. This blessing ought naturally to have been given just before Isaac's death.

Though Isaac was old and his eyes were dim, he was still far from death, indeed, he lived forty years longer. But probably he thought that if he gave the blessing unexpectedly and before the time, Rebekah and Jacob would not be aware of what was passing, and could not prevent him. He forgot that the birthright was not in his own hand to give or to withhold, but in the hand of God, and that it was only by the inspiration of God that he could give it. In thus rebelling against the will of God he could effect nothing, for the quiet purpose of God would not be over-ruled. Esau also must have known what the prophecy was. He still more surely must have known that he had, of his own free will, forfeited his right. He had deliberately sold the birthright. We must bear these facts in mind if we are to judge fairly in the matter, otherwise the meanness and trickery of Jacob stand out so largely on the page that our whole sympathy goes out to Isaac and to Esau. But, after all, if Rebekah and Jacob were trying to cheat Isaac, Isaac and Esau were trying to turn aside the will of God.

The Wrongdoing of Rebekah and Jacob.

Then as to Rebekah. She overheard what Jacob said, laid her plot, and told Jacob to deceive his father. It has been said that Rebekah sinned, not for herself, but, as she thought, for God and for her son. She knew that it was God's will that Jacob should receive the birthright; but sin is sin, whether we do it in the cause of right or in the cause of another, and the punishment of God falls upon sin because it is sin, no matter what the motive may be. Jacob is shocked, not at the thought of the sin and the deception, but for fear lest he should be found out and a curse come upon him. His mother says, "Upon me be thy curse, my son." How lightly these words were said, how sadly they came true. A bitterer half of the punishment fell upon Rebekah than upon Jacob, for he, the light of her eyes, had to leave her, and, as far as we learn from the Bible, never saw her again. "Upon me be the punishment, my son," seems to be an unselfish exclamation. Is it

unselfish to sin for the sake of another? If it is unselfish, then why is it wrong? It is entirely wrong, because our duty to God stands first, and it is idolatry when we put the service or love of another before our service and love of God. Rebekah idolized Jacob, and in idolizing him her first love and obedience were drawn away from God.

The account of the deception is given, each sad detail seeming to ring out with heavier and heavier knell as it goes on. We cannot understand how Jacob could put on his brother's garments, how he could make the elaborate preparations, how he could go into his father's presence and begin to deceive him, how he could go on as each act of deception brought a still worse one in its train, lie after lie, until at last there is even the kiss, almost like the kiss of Judas. Luther said, "If it had been I, I should have dropped the dish." And, truly, we none of us know until we begin to sin how far we can go. "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?" we say, when we watch the course of sin in another; sometimes, alas! when we see the course of sin in ourselves, and learn too late how one sin has entangled us and drawn us into another.

The Character of the Blessing.

Then Isaac gave the blessing. But in the words of the blessing we find how much there is of what is temporal, how little of what is spiritual. How far away Isaac seems from God when compared with his father Abraham; and yet he did give the blessing, and Jacob got what he sought, and went out of his father's presence. If Isaac is far away from Abraham, how much farther is Jacob? Jacob could not wait God's time to give the blessing. He was afraid that, if he did not seize the opportunity, and take this step, in another hour the blessing would be gone. How sadly this spirit of grasping contrasts with the calm patience of Abraham on Mount Moriah, who could rest his soul upon God although only one moment seemed to stand between him and the death of his only son.

The Awakening of Isaac and Esau.

Then came the return of Esau, and with his return Isaac awoke to the realization of what he had done. His sin was brought home to him at the sound of his son's voice, and he "trembled very exceedingly." He knew also that he could not reverse the blessing he had given. God's will had spoken through him, and Jacob was blessed. It seems almost as if Isaac's sense of God had been dulled by long years of far away following of God, and that this cry of Esau carried him back to the consciousness of God and of duty which had had power over him in his boyhood. But it was too late.

Then came Esau's part. He cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, but it was not the cry of sorrow because he had sold his birthright, nor had it any ring of true repentance. It was sorrow because he had lost what he wanted, a cry of selfishness which marks the distinction between sorrow and true repentance. True repentance makes us grieve that we have offended against God, and makes us willing to bear the punishment of our sin, whereas Esau's repentance meant mortification because he had lost what he wanted to get, and grief because he had to undergo punishment.

God's forgiveness does not mean that we shall not suffer the natural consequences of our sin; it means that God's face will turn to us again, and that we can get up again and try to do better. Esau did not see God's face turned towards him because he did not intend to change his life, nor did he want to do so. His was a mere cry of mortification. Isaac gave him what blessing he could; that is to say, such as his character allowed of, corn and wine, and at last freedom from the dominion of his brother.

The Wages of Sin.

Esau and his descendants bore the mark of his sin for ever, they were called Edom or red pottage, in memory of the fateful day when he chose the present instead of the future. There was no change in his heart, for he came out of his father's room caring only for the satis-

faction of his vengeance. So wild is his anger, that his only satisfaction is in the thought that his father will soon be dead, and that when he is dead and the days of mourning passed he will have a chance of satisfying his anger by slaying his brother. Rebekah hears his words, and of all the broken-hearted speeches in the Bible, hers is one of the saddest. She has to go and tell Jacob to leave her. He must flee away to her brother in Haran. Most pitiful is the way in which she says he is to tarry there, only for a few days, and then she will send and fetch him; why should she be deprived of both her sons in one day? But she is not changed. There is no frank confession of her sin to Isaac, no reunion with him. She tells him, what is no doubt partially true, that Jacob had better go and get a daughter of the chosen seed, and that she is weary of her life because of the idolatrous women whom Esau has married, and she thus glosses over the reason of Jacob's departure, and persuades Isaac to let him go. That he should go was, in consequence of his sin, the only thing that was possible. But how sad the state of feeling in the home whether Jacob stayed or went. If he stayed, the home was impossible to him and to everyone, and if he went, there was a cloud which could never be removed. Isaac, of necessity, would trust Rebekah less than ever, and would chafe inwardly under her management of him. Esau would feel bitterly towards his mother, and Rebekah would yearn, day by day, for the sight and sound of the son of her love, the one who thoroughly understood her, and on whom she leaned. It is a warning to us to remember that this sad outcome was not a sudden catastrophe, the yielding to overpowering temptation, but it was the outcome of the building up of character during many years. Isaac's soul must have been dulled by living away from close communion with God. Rebekah had idolized her son, and had allowed the quickness and impulsiveness of her character to lead her into acts of small deception, or as we call them, of management of another. Esau had despised his birthright. Jacob had coolly schemed, instead of trusting God.

LESSON XV.

GENESIS XXVIII.

THE VISION AT BETHEL.

The House left Desolate.

The story of the deception and sin of that one sad day in the tents of Isaac closed with the last chapter, but its effects remained and would remain in the lives of all who had taken part in them. It was saddest of all for Rebekah. She had sinned for Jacob, and though she had obtained that for which she sinned, yet when she came to herself she must have known that what God had promised would have been Jacob's anyhow, and she must also have seen that Jacob in his haste would be an outcast from her and from his father's house for many years. There was also the danger that in consequence of his absence he would forfeit his share of the inheritance.

She calculated that Esau's anger would soon pass, as it probably did, for Esau was careless as well as generous. But she had not calculated upon the fact that Jacob, driven away from her, would find in Laban a character more shrewd, crafty, and managing than his own.

It is strange how the very sins which we have practised towards others turn upon us in our after-life. Jacob had deceived his father, he would in turn be deceived by Laban. He would be entangled, and would have to serve fourteen years for his wife, and many more years in gathering together possessions for himself and for his family, and thus the few days that Rebekah had spoken of would pass into many years.

The chapter does not mention Rebekah, but tells us the effect of the consequences upon Isaac, Esau, and Jacob of all that had passed.

The Awakened Conscience of Isaac.

Isaac had been recalled to himself when he found that despite himself he had fulfilled the will of God, and had given the blessing to the one whom God had chosen to be blessed. And this awakening, which caused him at first to tremble exceedingly, seems to have brought back the religious feeling of his early days, for as he listens to the voice of Rebekah he remembers how a wife had been brought to him from the old land of Ur, and he calls Jacob and bids him go and get a wife, one upon whom the blessing of God may rest. Then further, he gives him the fuller earthly and spiritual blessing, and gives it directly from the hand of God. It is to be the blessing of Abraham.

The Dulled Conscience of Esau.

Esau sees Jacob depart. It is curious to notice the working of his mind. He apparently still wishes to get the blessing, and he thinks that in order to do so he had better marry a wife who does not belong to the idolatrous races of Canaan. He may have known that the wives that he had, as the Bible expresses it, were a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah, and so he marries a daughter of Ishmael, and therefore a descendant of Abraham. Nothing is said about her, but considering the character of Ishmael her father, it is not likely that she was a God-fearing member of the household.

The Separation of Jacob.

The story now passes to *Jacob*, and his journey towards the East. Jacob travelled until he came towards Haran, and as he went the strangeness and loneliness of his journey must have been heavy upon him. He had not naturally the roving disposition of Esau, to whom the change and excitement of the unknown would have brought pleasure.

Jacob was a plain man dwelling in tents, and deeply

attached to his mother. He knew that he had left her. He knew that by the effect of his sin, his home had closed to him perhaps forever. He knew that he might have forfeited his share of the inheritance, and Jacob was too far-seeing a man and too intent upon gain to take this lightly. Further, he might have thought that he was far away from God. That this was in his mind as he journeyed comes out in after years when he said: "God that answered my prayer," showing that the dream was the gathering up and the answer to the thoughts of the day.

The Gate of Heaven.

Travellers tell us that he was passing over a tract of land which to a man who had always dwelt in a plain would seem like steps, a rocky stairway leading up the side of the hills with a great unknown beyond it. This thought may have mingled with his dream. At last he lay down to sleep, and took of the stones of the place and put them for a pillow. An old Commentator says: "Sin gives hard pillows."

Then came God's answer and God's call to him. For the time, though not by his own will, he was separated and alone. He was starting out in life. His future lay all before him, and God drew near and gave him an invitation to return to Him; a call to return from sin and lead his life Godward instead of selfward.

In Jacob's dream he learned first that God was still with him although he had left his father's tent; that from this spot there was an approach into the very Heaven itself, and that he was not alone, two great and wonderful thoughts. Would that each boy and girl as they start out on their journey through life could realize these great facts. That they could realize the nearness of Heaven to earth and that they are never alone, but that the great unseen hosts of good as well as of evil are around them wheresoever they may go.

The Lord God of Abraham.

Then comes the voice of God. That same voice that had spoken to Abraham and sometimes to Isaac, that voice

which, though he had never heard it before, yet Jacob, as well as those who came after him, have never failed to recognize. How full and grand the promise that God makes to him is, when we compare it with the blessing of his father. The best that we can wish for for each other falls short of the fulness that God is ready to give. God tells him that the God of Abraham and of Isaac is going to be his God also; that He will give him the land whereon he lies; that his seed shall spread abroad; and, best of all, that from his seed all the families of the earth will be blessed. Further, a personal blessing will rest upon Jacob, individually in his own life. God will be beside him and will not leave him until He has fulfilled His promises. There was more in this than even Jacob could have realized.

Jacob's imperfect Comprehension of the Vision.

The effect upon Jacob is what might have been expected. He had known so little of God, and had followed his own way to sin, so that the consciousness of God's presence brought fear rather than joy. "How dreadful is this place!" And the second was a feeling, not so much of the nearness of God perpetually as that this peculiar spot on which he was resting had in God's mercy been a holy one, the house of God and the gate of Heaven. In years to come he probably understood the vision and read far more into it than he did when he awoke on the first impulse of the moment. We can almost see him start from his sleep as this first thought chases through his mind, but as he lies there awaiting the dawn its meaning gradually unfolds itself.

He rises early in the morning, sets up the stone for a pillar and consecrates it to God, a sign and a monument that God is to be his God, and further, he consecrates himself to God by a vow.

Jacob's Vow.

As we read the vow it is at first most disappointing. It seems as if the only thought that Jacob had was a desire to make the best conditions he could with

God. It is better to read the passage in the Revised Version; for it takes the worst and most calculating meaning out of it, "So that I may come to my father's house in peace, and the Lord will be my God then this stone which I have set up for a pillar shall be God's house." The meaning of it comes to this, the first feeling of awe and terror has passed away. Jacob desires the presence of God, and desires God to go with him. He responds to the call and invitation of God. He asks for immediate needs, and as a stranger, alone, and with nothing but a staff in his hand, he asks for bread and raiment and to return to his house. Who can wonder at these temporal requests? After all it is the natural calling out for help in his present need, and over and over again Christ urges us to do this. We draw near, and Jesus always pities and understands the imperfections of our prayer, however mingled it is with weakness. What Jacob does pledge himself to is that the pillar which he sets up shall be a house of God. That is to say, God shall be the God of the land that He is about to give him; and that he will acknowledge God as the Supreme Sovereign of the land by yielding to Him in token of His overrule the tenth of all that he has. Jacob has not yet learned the love of God, and therefore he has no thought of surrendering his whole heart and life to God.

Do we not, most of us, approach God in the same way that Jacob did? We need pardon for our sins, we need to be freed from the thought of His overhanging judgment, we need help of various kinds, and we draw near for this help. Later comes the love of God, the desire for righteousness in itself; the desire to see His face and to be satisfied with it.

Christ's Teaching as to the Vision.

Jacob, after all, understands the vision only dimly. It needed the light of God's subsequent dealing with him to illumine and bring out the meaning of it. Christ Himself explained it when He was speaking to Nathaniel, "Ye shall see the Heavens open and the angels of God ascending and

descending upon the Son of Man." Christ, perfect Man as well as perfect God, is the ladder set up on earth and reaching to Heaven. By Him the grace and Spirit of God descends to man and ascends again to God. Through Him we have access by one spirit unto the Father. This glorious thought contained in the Vision, as also the meaning of the phrase, "in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blest," was naturally not grasped by Jacob at the time, possibly not during his whole lifetime. The love that stooped and took him as he was and was with him in all places whither he went, and gradually gave him strength to cast off his sin, through Christ, descends in even fuller measure on those who start out on life's journey, if, like Jacob, when they hear God's call they respond to it, take God for their God, and consecrate their future lives to Him.

Jacob's Consciousness of his High Destiny.

Jacob must have gone on his way a changed man. He had a great destiny to fulfil. He had a work on earth to do for God as well as for himself, and the change which came over him is like that which comes to those who hear the call of God. God is near, His hosts are around us, and every man and woman has a work given him to do not only in the building up of his own character but also in the world. He may understand it imperfectly, as Jacob did. He may at first feel afraid of God, he may see more clearly what he wants from God than feel any love for God in his heart, and his prayer may be mingled with sin; but the call accepted is the main thing, after this the guiding hand of God will be with him, and lead him forward until at last he stands in the land of his inheritance.

LESSON XVI.

GENESIS XXXII.

JACOB, THE SUPPLANTER ; ISRAEL, THE PRINCE OF GOD.

The Self-Reliance of Jacob.

Jacob had accepted the birthright, and at Bethel he had by covenant taken the God of Abraham for his God. He was thus the acknowledged successor of Abraham and of Isaac ; but, as he started out in life, he was very far from having the strong faith of Abraham or the patience and devotion of Isaac. Jacob's first trust was in himself. It was to himself that he turned in difficulty, and it was by his own cunning and by his own power of forcing circumstances to bend before him that he determined to make his way in the world. He had many a hard step, many a bitter experience, before this self-trust was turned into a living reliance upon God. The story of his life, from his setting out at Bethel until his meeting with God at Penuel, is the story of a strong and self-reliant man who is carried through difficulties by his indomitable will until that will is broken and surrendered. It is a working out, also, of the goodness and patience of God, which will not leave Jacob. He has led him, step by step, to find out the weakness of self, and, finally, the strength of God.

The Choice of Rachel.

So Jacob starts out upon his journey, his object being, like that of Eliezer, to go to the country from which a

woman can be found who will fear God. But as he draws near the country of Laban, we notice the difference between the two men. Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, had imbibed his master's spirit, and whilst eagerly desirous of making the best choice for Isaac, his first reliance was upon God. He drew near in prayer and asked for His direction, and that he might know this direction by certain signs. Jacob went forward, and attracted by the beauty of his cousin Rachel, then probably a young girl of about thirteen or fourteen years of age, he chose her at once as his future wife, and asked Laban that he might win her for himself. As we read the account, and as we think of the later history of Jacob, we cannot help wondering whether Rachel was the wife whom God had chosen for him.

Her elder sister, Leah, seems, from the names that she gave to her sons, to have been a servant of God, whereas Rachel worshipped idols, and was, like her father Laban, deceitful and difficult. Again, God blessed Leah with many sons, and from her the royal line of Judah was descended.

As Jacob would have his own way and get the blessing without waiting for God, so he seems to have chosen his wife without prayer or any sign from God, and much home sorrow was the consequence. Still his love for Rachel was deep and strong. He served for her fourteen years, and they seemed but a day to him, for the love that he had unto her, and to the close of his life glimpses of his strong love, even after she was dead, come out.

Jacob's Sin Repeated upon Himself.

Jacob found in Laban one far more cunning and unscrupulous than himself, a money-seeker and a defrauder, and he was recognized as such even in his own family.

Laban literally sold his daughters, and we find in the Bible how bitterly they resented it. "He hath sold us and hath quite devoured also our money." It was not even a fair sale, for Jacob had had practically to become a slave in order to win Rachel.

Then, again, Laban cheated Jacob in his wages. For Jacob says: "Your father hath deceived me, and changed

my wages ten times." It was no thanks to Laban that Jacob had been able to support his wife and family, and that he had prospered. God protected Jacob and gave him wealth so that he became powerful, so powerful that the jealousy of Laban's sons was excited against him. They murmured, and when they murmured Jacob found that Laban also, despite the faithful service which he had rendered him, had turned against him.

The bitterness could no longer be borne, yet how could Jacob escape, hampered as he was with wives, little children, flocks and herds? And yet the command of God came clearly to him: "Return, and I will be with you."

There is a touching account of his sending for Rachel and Leah to meet him in the field. If any man had served a master well, Jacob had served Laban. He could truly say: "With all my power I have served your father." Yet it was in vain, and the call of God had come to him to leave. Rachel and Leah were willing, and when Laban was absent Jacob stole away, together with all that belonged to him.

God's Protection of His Servant.

Jacob was a timid man; but had he been as brave as Esau, he might well have been afraid. He might steal away three days' journey, but he was still in the power of Laban, and Laban was absolutely unscrupulous. Why should we expect him to let Jacob escape any more than Pharaoh to let the Children of Israel go? Laban had learned that God had blessed him through the faithful service of Jacob; the very value of his work made Laban want to keep him. But God, who had given the command, gave also the protection. A dream came to Laban by night, and he was forbidden to touch Jacob or to speak to him either good or bad.

One cause of complaint, however, Laban had, and that a just one, for his images had been stolen—those idols on which his crafty nature rested as something visible that could help him, and to which he turned far more than to the God of his fathers. But Jacob knew nothing of the idols, and in all honesty declared that they were not with

him. Then he made an appeal to Laban. He appealed to the faithfulness of the service he had rendered him, to their mutual fear of God, and called upon him to make a covenant, which covenant would define the nature of their future relationship, the one to the other. Laban agreed, and a stone was set up which was to form the boundary line between the two men and their followers, and it was called "Mizpah." "The Lord watch between me and thee when we are absent one from another."

This has often been taken as a watchword between those who are greatly attached to each other, but are driven apart by fate. It is used as a prayer or watchword, that God will keep them united when they are thus separated. It is strange to go back and to see how different the original meaning of Mizpah was. It was a stone of storm and of menace. God, who had intervened to protect Jacob from the violence of Laban, is by this stone called upon to continue His intervention and to watch, so that no injustice take place, and that neither man injure the other. He is to watch that neither passes beyond the heap to go to the other, and should either overpass is to judge between them. Nothing could more forcibly bring out the character of the two men and their suspicion of each other. They then broke bread, and Laban left Jacob.

Mahanaim.

Jacob had escaped from Laban, and had made a promise of peace with him, but as he went on his way another and a far greater danger was before him. If Laban had cause of anger against him, how much greater had Esau, for Jacob had sinned against Esau, and the remembrance of his sin was heavy upon him. How could he go forward? What power had he, weighted down with his wives, his little ones, and his herds, to meet this fierce man of the desert? Yet God had bidden him return, and as at the start of his journey God's angels had drawn near to him, so now at his return, on the brink of the Promised Land, another gracious manifestation was given to him. He is helpless, he has a powerful enemy behind him, and he

has a more powerful enemy before him ; but he lifts his eyes, and sees the host of God encamped before him. He calls the name of the place Mahanaim ; that is to say, two camps—his own little camp of helplessness and God's great camp of power. For the moment all sense of danger passed away. Mizpah, the stone of God's protection, stood between Jacob and Laban, and the army of God's host was encamped between him and Esau.

A similar vision of the presence of God's angels has at different times been given to the servants of God in their hour of greatest need. Thus, Gordon at Khartoum closed his last letter with the words, "The hosts are with me, Mahanaim." The hosts were with Jacob to deliver him from Esau ; with Gordon to bear him, like Elijah, to Heaven. Would that we could always lift our eyes and see through the mists how near our God is.

" The hosts of God encamp around
The dwellings of the just ;
Deliverance He affords to all
Who on His succour trust."

Jacob's Embassy to Esau.

Jacob, encouraged, no doubt, by the vision, sent messengers to sound Esau. We are struck all through this chapter by the alertness of Jacob's mind. It has been said that he was as alert as a fox, and certainly his precautions were well taken. His message to his brother is submissive and friendly, and is meant to disarm him, but it is a shock to Jacob to find that, although he is sending a friendly message to Esau, still Esau is marching against him.

Probably Jacob had read Esau's character aright, and had thought, as Rebekah did, that though his anger was hot, it would soon be turned away, and he would forget : but the news that he is coming with an army of four hundred men dispels his calculation and his hope. Then Jacob is indeed distressed, and the thought of the vision of God's host seems to have passed from his mind, and to have become a beautiful idea rather than a consciousness of instant protection and power.

The calamity that was impending over Jacob was not greater than that which impended over Abraham when he stretched out the knife and was about to kill Isaac, but Abraham had learned and knew what faith was. His faith was ready to do *whatsoever* God commanded him, and this is the real test; this is why he was called the friend of God, "Ye are my friends, if ye do *whatsoever* I command you." His faith was a part of himself; whereas Jacob was only beginning to spell out the lesson, a lesson which he would learn more sharply during the next few hours in the school of adversity.

Jacob's Prayer.

Jacob immediately makes preparations according to the best of his power. He divides the company into two groups, putting many of his followers in the first group, those whom he loved most into the second. His hope is that if the first is smitten, the second, containing those dearest to him, may escape. He then draws near to God in prayer; and it is very interesting, as we read it, to place this prayer of Jacob's side by side with his first prayer at Bethel. As we read the two, we might almost call this the first prayer, for at Bethel his prayer partook rather of the nature of a bargain, or covenant. Now he has learned more, and, taught by his present extremity, he begins to pray. He pleads that he is obeying God's command. He confesses his own unworthiness and God's great goodness. He acknowledges that God's blessing has rested upon him. "With my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands." He asks for distinct help and deliverance from his brother, and, lastly, he pleads God's promise as the thing which he is resting upon.

His prayer ended, he apparently sees that it will be necessary to make some sacrifice. He sends forward present after present, hoping that Esau will be more and more appeased as each comes. Lastly, he sends his wives and family across the ford Jabbok.

Jacob at Penuel.

Then comes that great and mysterious scene at Penuel, a scene so hard to understand, and yet so full of teaching wherever we can pierce the mystery and grasp the meaning of it. Jacob was possibly absorbed in prayer to God when there appeared to him a man, who was afterwards spoken of as an angel, and whom Jacob later spoke of as God. "I have seen God face to face," and with this mysterious and Nameless One he wrestled all night long. At daybreak the Visitant touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh and disabled him, thus showing Jacob His mysterious power, and teaching him that His forbearance alone had enabled him to wrestle so long. It was but the touch of His hand and all Jacob's power was gone, but Jacob still clung to God, and would not let Him go until He blessed him.

The greatest blessing which God could give to Jacob was the casting out of his cunning and self-reliance, and this was the answer to his prayer. He was no longer to be the cunning supplanter, but Israel, a prince of God, resting upon God and strong in God.

Resting, Abiding, Trusting.

There are very many lessons to be learned from Penuel. The first is how to cast out a besetting sin, something stronger than all else within us, something which seems more impossible to cast out than life itself. What we cannot do alone can be done when wrestling in prayer with God. It was here the touch of a Hand ; when Christ was on earth it was a touch, a look, a word from Him, but as each came the evil spirit was cast out and a new spirit given. There are other thoughts that arise from this story. There is the thought of Christ's walk with the disciples at Emmaus, how He was detained by them, and they prayed Him to abide with them. This seems to be akin to the way in which Jacob wrestled with and detained the angel. Those who desire the abiding power of God to rest upon them may, like Jacob, claim and keep it.

There is yet another thought that is helpful. The Angel had shown Jacob in the vision what his past life had been,

his fault, and what his hope for the future must be. Jacob had feared God, but he had really rested upon himself, and he had acted upon his own impulse and according to his own reason; he had beaten out his own way without waiting for God's way! Now he is utterly hopeless. Esau, with his four hundred men, is coming against him. Jacob can no more fight with Esau than he could struggle with the Angel after the Angel had touched the muscle of his thigh and shrivelled it. But Jacob with God's power behind him would be protected from Esau, only it must be the power of prayer, the clinging to God. "I will not let thee go except thou bless me" were his words, and so the great change passed over him. He learned the entire giving of himself to God which Abraham had learned, and which Isaac had learned also when he consented to let Abraham kill him. Then Jacob went back into the land of his inheritance, a prince of God, and with the power of God within him.

It is a long journey from Bethel—where the utmost that Jacob could realize was that he was in the House of God, and that he was afraid—to Penuel, where he sees the face of God, clings to Him and receives a change of spirit.

The Meeting of the Brothers.

The rest of the story follows with exquisite beauty. God seems to have touched Esau just as He had touched Jacob. The meeting between the brothers is described. Jacob, who has tried to supplant Esau, gives him of his wealth, indeed forces him to take it. Esau, who had been waiting to kill Jacob, accepts as a token of forgiveness what is given, and offers himself to protect Jacob or to leave some of his followers to help him. But Jacob wisely refuses. Only difficulty would come if he attempted to make two bands so incongruous as that of his women kind and little children march with Esau's wild Bedouins, and so the brothers part in peace, and God's hand rescues Jacob from Laban and from Esau, fulfills the promise to bring him again into his land, and does not leave him until He has fulfilled that which He had promised to him.

LESSON XVII.

GENESIS XXXV.

DEBORAH AND RACHEL.

The Lingering in Shechem.

Jacob had been delivered from the hand of Laban and of Esau, and had been brought back to his own land in peace. He was no longer alone. With his staff he had passed over Jordan, but now he had become two bands. One would have thought that his natural impulse would have been to go to Bethel, and to return thanks to God who had blessed him, and been with him. Instead of that we find that he settled in Shechem, bought land there, and erected an altar to God, the God of Israel. Either the pastures which attracted his grandfather Abraham attracted him also, or possibly he was forgetful of his promise towards God; possibly, also, he knew that there was sin and idolatry in his family, and being a man of peace he shrank from taking the stern action which would be necessary in order to put it away.

The chapter opens with the call of God to Jacob to arise and go to Bethel. It is no question of difficulties, of leaving good pastures or encountering the opposition of his household; it is a question of duty. God, who had protected him when he was fleeing from Esau; God, who had prospered him during his sojourn with Laban, now called upon him to renew his vow. We are so ready to make promises to God when we are lonely or in trouble, and so apt to forget them or to put off the fulfilment of them when

things go well with us. Ecclesiastes, v. 4: "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it."

Jacob's Performance of his Vow.

The change in Jacob's character after he had seen God face to face in Penuel is markedly shown in this action. Jacob, who had before resorted to subterfuge and had sought his own interest, while he nominally followed God, now takes a true and noble stand. Rachel had stolen the household gods of Laban, the most precious possessions of her father. She had kept them by fraud, and unquestionably set great store by them. Jacob has to choose between serving God or condoning the sin of his wife. He gathers his household around him, and insists upon the putting away of all strange gods; bids them be clean, and remember that in approaching a holy God they must be holy. He takes possession of the idols when surrendered, and takes the strong action of burying them under the oak which is in Shechem. The whole marks a great change in the tone and character of Jacob. In the first place, he himself was free from idolatry, but he might have approached God and condoned the sin of his family, whereas his action was that of a strong, whole-hearted man. In the second place, Jacob loved wealth; he might have been reluctant to part with the treasure, the gold, the earrings, and the idols; or having obtained possession of the treasure, he might have melted them down, or put them to another use. But like his grandfather Abraham, when he was offered the treasure of Sodom, Jacob would not touch what had been an abomination unto God. He teaches not only his family, but also the whole camp, that idols are an abomination to God; and that because they draw men's eyes away from God, they are abomination, and must be put away altogether. We see how greatly Jacob had grown in whole-hearted service to God, and consequently in moral courage, for in doing this he had to take from Rachel, a wife so dearly loved, her most cherished possession. Jacob's action in this matter is a lesson to us also. Whatever draws us away from God becomes, like the brazen serpent,

Nehushtan, an abomination. "God is a spirit, and they that worship Him, must worship Him in spirit and in truth." There have been times in the history of the Christian Church when it has been necessary for the men who realized this truth to arise and put away whatever interfered with purity of worship, and drew men down to the things seen and away from the things of God. We owe a debt of gratitude to all those heroes of the Christian Faith who from time to time, with unflinching hand, have put away from the Christian Church whatever might lead to idolatry. For the human heart is always the same, and the eye of faith must be kept clear and unclouded and lifted up to the God who is invisible, and who is to be worshipped in spirit and in truth.

God's Blessing upon Jacob.

The brave deed done, God's blessing visibly rested upon Jacob. As he journeyed, he was overshadowed and defended by the hand of God. With a strange awe, the terror of God around him, no one dared to touch him. It was little wonder that he had shrunk from the journey, for as we see in the account of Esau, he had no means of defence, and he had a large band dependent upon him. But he was safe ; as he passed from place to place no one dared to touch him, or to pursue after him.

At last Jacob reached Bethel, and a strange thrill must have passed through him, as he saw once again the rocky pathway which, when mingled in his dreams, became a ladder reaching down towards him. We can almost see Jacob as he stood there a second time in the sunset, with Joseph his favourite son, beside him ; and hear him tell the story of that far-away night ; of his utter desolation as he lay down to sleep ; of the still, small voice of God, answering the thoughts of his heart, and filling him with hope. How gladly he must have turned to build the altar, and to renew his promise. With what awe and gladness must he have listened once again to the voice of God, a voice full of hope and of promise, and above all, a voice which confirmed to him the new name, marking the change in his character.

The thought of his former sin must have been vividly present to him. How welcome was the voice which told him that that sin was pardoned, his character changed, and that the blessing of Abraham and of Isaac would rest upon him and upon his seed for ever.

Jacob set up the pillar which he had formerly vowed, and the place was known then and ever after, as the House of God, the place where God had twice appeared to Jacob.

The Death of Deborah.

One sad event that throws some light upon a story that we would so gladly know more of, occurs here. Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died. It seems from this that Rebekah had undoubtedly died whilst Jacob was with Laban, for her death would more surely have been recorded than that of Deborah. Probably Jacob had visited Isaac, and had brought back with him Deborah, the one link which remained to him of his mother. Probably he was greatly attached to her, for the oak under which she was buried was called "the oak of weeping."

This mention of Deborah throws a beautiful light upon the relation of employer and employed. All through Old Testament history we catch glimpses of faithful servants, and the honour and respect in which they were held in households. It is dear also to all women. There is often some woman in a family whose presence is felt rather than seen. She bears the heaviest part of the burden; she helps every member of the family through the sharpest crises of their lives, and yet she, herself, is never in a place of honour. She knows nothing of the joy of being wife or mother, and at times her life goes on in one long round of small, unselfish acts and kindnesses. And yet, perhaps, the home owes more to her than to anyone else, for her example and influence have moulded the characters of the boys and girls who have grown up around her. To such a one this mention of Deborah is precious. It shows that quiet work of this kind is known and honoured by God. The story of the woman who broke the ointment upon the feet of Jesus has been told, and will be told as long as the

world lasts ; and so, too, the mention of Deborah, the faithful nurse of Rebekah, and the affection and esteem in which she was held, has been recorded and handed down by the spirit of God for all succeeding generations.

The Death of Rachel.

A far heavier sorrow came now upon Jacob. Rachel, for whom he had served so many years, and whom he loved so dearly, died in giving birth to a son at Ephrath, a mile from Bethlehem. There is a great pathos about her death. The loss to Jacob was irreparable—a loss which he bore with him to the end of his days—for despite all the weaknesses and imperfections of her character, his love for her was strong, and broke forth long after her death, when he was blessing her grandchildren, Ephraim and Manasseh. There is something very touching in the way in which he says, “there was yet but a little way to come unto Ephrath.” From this time forward a heavy cloud of sorrow settled down upon Jacob. But there is far greater pathos in the story of Rachel herself. It has been said of her, and truly, that no action or word of hers that was strong, unselfish, or helpful, has been recorded. The only bright scene is the one in which, as a beautiful girl, she kept her father’s sheep. After that, from time to time, when her name appears, it is in connection with fretfulness and deceit. She is selfish, even when she is dying, and calls her child Ben-oni, the son of my sorrow, a name which would have been pain to his father, and heavy upon the child himself, had not Jacob changed it to “the son of my right hand.” It is a sad record, for God had given her the gift of great beauty and charm ; had she been also strong and unselfish, how much she might have done for Jacob and for her whole household !

Rachel Weeping for her Children.

Her name still lingered on, either for her grace and beauty or because of Jacob’s love for her, and the spot where she was buried was held sacred. By it in later days Saul received the first sign of his coming kingship. In

regard to it Jeremiah, xxxi. 15, received a strange vision, in which the past and the future were mingled ; the prophet heard Rachel weeping for the doom of her children, and also for those children hereafter to be slain at the birth of Christ. This prophecy is repeated by St. Matthew when he tells its after fulfilment, and hears in very deed Rachel weeping for her children.

Rachel's tomb has been a sacred spot from that time until the present day, and we read of it as being visited by the Crusaders and all others who, from time to time, have visited those places which are most reverenced in the Holy Land.

Esau and Jacob at the Grave of Isaac.

Lastly comes the account of Jacob's visit to his father Isaac, and of the death of Isaac, and his burial by his two sons. It is good to read of the presence of the two brothers at the grave of their father, just as Isaac and Ishmael stood beside the grave of Abraham.

Solomon says that "a brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city," a warning which shows how careful brothers and sisters should be in their conduct towards one another, far more so than when dealing with outsiders, in order to prevent dispute and quarrel. For a brother once offended may be lost forever. There is further teaching as to this point to be found in the story of Jacob and Esau, for it shows that differences between brothers can be reconciled. After Jacob's anxious prayer to God, Esau ran to meet Jacob and kissed him, and Jacob was so filled with joy at seeing him that he said it seemed as though he had seen the face of God. As we look at the two brothers beside their father's grave, we can almost realize their feelings. What a rush of memory must have passed over them as they stood together again ! For it was at a time like this that the depths of their nature would be stirred ; the past would start up again and be as keenly vivid as the present. Both brothers must have seen as clearly as though they were standing once again in the old home the sale of the birthright, the

deception over the blessing, and all the family discord. Thus the two lessons that we can learn from it are that, in the first place, we can and ought to become friends again, no matter what has passed ; but in the second place that, although we may be reconciled to one another, we cannot undo the wrong that has been done, it will rise up against us from time to time, and, especially at a crisis like that of death, will rush over us, like a wave of the surging sea. We shall hear once again the hard, stinging, bitter words, which we would so gladly recall, the little acts of injustice and of over-reaching, the harsh judgments, the petty slights, especially those which touched either father or mother. We may walk side by side again with our brother, but at the same time we walk side by side with the recollection of the sins of the life that is past even though they are forgiven.

Esau was now a man of strength, with hundreds of warriors at his command, cities that he had built, districts which owned him as lord. Jacob had wealth, and knew that he was founding a great and limitless kingdom. But as Jacob and Esau laid their father in the grave the thought of the wealth and the power that each owned must have been comparatively of little moment to them. Far stronger, just then, must have been the recollection of the past, the deeds done which could not be undone, even though they had been forgiven by each other and by God.

LESSON XVIII.

GENESIS XXXVII.

FAITHFUL SERVICE AND ITS REWARD.

The Growth of Israel.

Up to this point God had dealt with the chosen head of a family, and that family had wandered as strangers in a land hereafter to be theirs. The present chapter marks the beginning of a change in the dispensation of God. The family becomes a tribe, and the interposition of God is not so much with the individual head of a family as with the whole tribe and nation. Again, instead of a family wandering in a land, we see a tribe rapidly gaining in numbers and in power; so strong that it is necessary for it to leave that particular land and to be sheltered until it is strong enough to return and conquer the whole country and expel the inhabitants.

The present chapter and those which immediately follow tell how God prepared the way for this removal from Canaan into the land of Egypt, and the way in which present sorrow and calamity is over-ruled for ultimate good. Joseph was the means by which God opened the door into Egypt. In it we have revealed to us the way in which God causes all things to work together for His own purpose. The sin of Joseph's brothers, the famine in Egypt, the action of Pharaoh, the whole can be summed up in the words of Joseph: "Ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good."

The Character and Early Surroundings of Joseph.

Joseph at this time was seventeen years old. He seems to have had exceptional gifts of character, and to have united in him the noblest traits of his race. He had the strength, dignity, and capacity of Abraham; the patience and self-devotion of Isaac; the cleverness, affection, and tenacity of Jacob; and to all these were added the personal charm and magnetism of his mother. He had just passed through circumstances which must have impressed a nature such as his very greatly. He had seen the idols buried at Shechem. He had been present at Bethel, and had heard and realized the story of his father's vision. He may have helped to set up the pillar which commemorated God's second appearance to Jacob. He had passed through that night, which must have stood out in darker outline than any other of his life, the night in which Esau, as an armed man, was coming upon his father. He had seen the anguish of his father when he had left the band on the other side of the brook, and at last, in the early morning light, he had seen him return lame, but with the look of anguish gone, and the light of a prince of God upon his face. Then there had been the death and burial of Deborah, Rachel, and Isaac, and his father, deprived of Rachel, had drawn very near to her elder son. Probably some of the love that he had given to the mother passed to her boy; certainly, he loved him more than all his children, and he intended him to take the leadership of the family, to be the first-born who was to succeed him in his inheritance. This is seen by his placing Joseph in authority over his brethren, and by his giving him a coat of many colours, or rather, the long white tunic, edged with colour, the sign of overlordship. Those who worked wore short coloured garments which would not impede them, or show the stain of labour. Those who had the rule, in token of superiority, wore the long garment thus described.

The Choice of Joseph.

It was not unfair that Jacob should make Joseph his first-born son. Reuben, Simeon, and Levi, the eldest sons

of Leah, had disqualified themselves by their sin. Joseph, the eldest son of Rachel, whom Jacob had chosen as his wife, might not unnaturally next take the precedence. But such a claim would be hard for the brothers to allow, and it made the position of Joseph an impossible one. His brothers hated him in proportion as his father loved him, and they hated him also because of the purity of his life, which must have stood out in sharp contrast to their own lives full of passion and sin. Lastly, they hated him because he was faithful to his father, and had the courage to bring their evil report to him.

The Loyalty of Joseph.

We are inclined to blame Joseph, and to dislike him for speaking against his brothers, and as children we looked upon him as a tale-bearer, and thought that all his later misfortunes were a punishment upon him for his tale-bearing. But, whilst we allow that he may have been injudicious, we have to take into account that it was not the case of a younger brother bringing tales to his father against his elder brothers, but, that it was the action of one set in authority, bringing to light the wrong-doing of those for whom he was responsible. There is no question that Joseph must have seen much that was evil among his brethren, much which, if he were loyal to his father, it was necessary that he should report. Moreover, when we read into his character what we know of his after life, his faithfulness to every master under whom he worked, his reticence and his wisdom of speech, it seems possible that Joseph was doing no more than his duty, and that a very hard one, when he thus incurred the anger of his brethren. Joseph is not the first, nor will he be the last of those who are placed in an almost impossible position, and who must either take part in, or be silent about, the sin of their fellow workers, if they are not to incur sharp hatred and the present ruin of their prospects.

Telling of Dreams.

The leadership which had been given to Joseph by his father, was confirmed by a dream from God. The dream

may have been partly the result of natural circumstances, for his father may have spoken to him about the birth-right, and his thoughts may have been full of his daily work, the binding of the sheaves of wheat in the field. To this first dream followed a second, which probably startled Joseph and made the first more significant. His father rebuked him, but, at the same time, was struck with what he said, and "observed the saying." His brothers hated him yet the more. This was only natural, for if the dream meant that God was going to confirm the choice of their father, then Joseph would receive all the privileges of the eldest son. And here we cannot help wondering whether it would not have been better if Joseph had kept the dream to himself, and been silent about the matter. God sometimes opens to the young visions of work, a future to which He will call them; and it is best that these visions should be left unclouded; that those who are called should recognize that it is a matter between themselves and God; and that whilst they shape their lives and bend their energy towards that vision, yet they should keep silence and await the further direction of Providence in their lives. There was clearly fault in the way in which Joseph narrated his dream. "They hated him yet the more for his dreams and for his words." This expression, and the words of his father, seem to point to a self-assertion on his part which needed sharp punishment in order to free him from it, and to guard him from anything of a like nature which might have neutralized his after work.

The Seeking of his Brothers at his Father's Command.

A more beautiful side of Joseph's character is now shown. His brothers went to feed the flock in Shechem, a place dangerous to them, because by their cruelty and sin they had excited the enmity of the people of Shechem. Yet it was a district rich in pasture, and it was probably necessary for them to lead their flock there in order to find pasture. Their father, knowing the state of Shechem, was anxious; possibly, also, he wanted to know what they were doing, for

he had little trust in them. Joseph was courageous as well as obedient, he must have known the feelings of his brothers towards him, and the danger of putting himself in their hands, yet, without a word of remonstrance he goes, and pursues his difficult search to Dothan, although he might have returned when he could not find them at Shechem.

Joseph seeking his brethren is a type of Christ coming into the world to seek those who were very far away from Him, and who would hate him and deal with Him as his brethren did with Joseph.

The Action of the Brethren.

One wonders little that Joseph had had an evil report to bring to his father about his brethren, especially the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, when we read the present story. Before the boy had drawn near, before he had even spoken a word, the mere sight of him made the evil flame of their passion arise. He had dreamed that he would be supreme over them. They cared nothing that the dream was from God ; they cared nothing for their father's love for Joseph ; they cared nothing for the consequences of their action, for the pain to their father, the death to the innocent lad ; nothing for the ordinary claims of humanity and pity. They would kill him, and find satisfaction for their hatred in his blood. Like Cain, they will follow up their murder with a lie,—and then let God fulfil the dream if He can, and their father carry out his purpose if he can.

Reuben and Joseph.

Two of the brothers oppose the action of the rest. Reuben should have had the chief grudge against Joseph, for he was the eldest son, and Joseph was supplanting him. But, on the other hand, Reuben was in a measure responsible for his brother, and felt his responsibility. His character was always weak and unstable, he seems to have had good impulses, and to have been of a far more generous nature than his brothers, but he was weak and vacillating. So now, although he could oppose them and rescue Joseph, he was not strong enough to deliver him

from what might have been worse than instant death—that is to say, from a long and lingering death in an underground pit.

These pits have been described to us by a Greek writer. He tells us that they were hewn out for water; deep cavities with sloping sides, having a mouth that could be covered by a stone; places from which it was absolutely impossible to escape; also places of exquisite torture, owing to the slime and living creatures infesting them, which would be a torment to one of a sensitive nature.

You can see the malicious triumph of the brothers, as they take his symbolic coat from him; their hardheartedness as they sit down to eat bread. Reuben alone had no appetite for such a meal, and he seems to have gone away from his brethren, either because he could not bear to hear the cry of Joseph, or to plan out some way of escape for him.

Then passed by the merchantmen going down to Egypt, and Judah, a stronger character than Reuben, effected a rescue, such as it was. Some have thought him more cold-blooded and cruel than his brothers. He certainly knew how to appeal to the baser side of their nature, but when we put his action and his words in this matter side by side with the later beauty of his action and words in the rescue of Benjamin, and when we remember the blessing of God and of his father that rested upon him, another view can be taken. At least, it was better for Joseph to be sold into Egypt than to be left in the horror of the pit. What that horror had been we can tell from his brothers' words in after years, "We saw the anguish of his soul when he besought us and we would not hear." Judah appealed to his brothers' love of money, also to the fact that blood-guiltiness would not rest upon their heads; they would not have the curse of Cain, and yet Joseph would be as effectually got rid of as if he were left in the pit. So he was taken up and sold for twenty pieces of silver.

Then came the despair of Reuben; a despair which shows that the measure had been simply temporary, and that he had determined to rescue his brother.

The Cruelty to Jacob and the Return of his Sin upon him.

The next scene is the most terrible of all. There is the well-thought-out cruelty in the taking of Joseph's coat and dipping it in the blood. The words, "thy son's coat," not "our brother's," but the son whom you have made so much of. How could they have seen the hopeless sorrow of their father, and done nothing to remove it? How could they have been silent when a word from any one of them would have given him relief?

Jacob had deceived his father; how bitterly is he now deceived himself! His sin has been repeated upon him, in a far more cruel and hopeless way. And it is sad, too, to see how beside himself with grief he is, and how for a time he has lost sight of God. There is complete abandonment in his sorrow; he does not see God in it or beyond it. "I will go down to the grave unto my son mourning." And for Joseph, as the chapter closes, there is no light either. He must have been conscious that he had been truer to his father than any of his brothers had been; that God had marked him out for His special work; and yet, as he went down into Egypt, to be sold as a slave, it all seemed to have passed as a dream. Evil had triumphed, and the path in which he would have served his father and his God together closed upon him.

LESSON XIX.

GENESIS XL.

PREPARATION FOR A LIFE WORK.

EVERYTHING seemed to have gone against Joseph. His faithful service to his father had ended in his being sold as a slave into Egypt. There was no hope of rescue, for his father was mourning him as dead. His brethren who had done wrong had triumphed, and yet, according to the revelation of God, blessing and prosperity were to rest upon the good, and punishment upon the evil. As Joseph was carried past his mother's grave, past the green hills where his home lay, he must have thought what a strange end had come to all his faithful service. Yet his faith was strong, and he kept the knowledge of God wherever he was, so that through the darkest days his faith remained unshaken. He had had dreams from God, but so far it seemed impossible that they could ever be fulfilled? Yet, when he was called upon to interpret dreams, he sought their meaning from God, and had unshaken trust in Him. The reward of his loyalty to his father had almost cost him his life, yet he was as upright, conscientious and loyal to the master he was called upon to serve as he had been before. And Joseph had his reward, for this unbroken faith, this strong trust, was forming and strengthening his character, and he was in the long run far happier, despite the sorrow and the discipline, than his brothers, who had apparently succeeded, and who now that Joseph was gone were freed from oversight.

The Sudden Transition of Joseph.

Before beginning the chapter it is well to gain some idea of the character of the country in which Joseph found himself, so that we may see how great the honour was to which God afterwards called him; what the temptations were to which he was exposed, and which he overcame. We realize how sudden the transition was in the case of David from the sheepfolds to the court of Saul; we do not realize how much greater the transition was of Joseph from the tents of his father to the court of Pharaoh.

Egypt and the Nile.

In order to do so it is necessary to think of the new surroundings in which he found himself. Egypt was at this time, and, during the life of Moses, continued to be at the height of its splendour. The inhabitants were the descendants of Ham, and it had been a civilized country from before the time of Abraham. The name Egypt has never been explained, but the inhabitants called it black on account of the richness of the soil. It was watered from the mountain ranges of Abyssinia, where the rain falls for half a year without ceasing, and from the hills of Abyssinia whence torrents flow into the Blue Nile, and again from the Blue Nile into the White Nile, which in its turn overflows. The fertility of the country was dependent then, as now, solely on the river. If the water in the Nile did not reach a certain height drought and famine ensued. The eastern portion of the delta of the Nile was marvellously fertile. This was the land of Goshen in which Joseph later placed his father and brethren, thus giving them a land suited to themselves and apart from Egypt; and also forming them into a barrier, so that they might keep off the neighbouring hordes, which might otherwise pour down into Egypt.

It is almost impossible now to realize the wealth and prosperity of the country. The city On, mentioned in the life of Joseph, as being the place from which he married his wife, was the great university centre then, and for years after. It was here that Plato and the wisest of the Greeks came to learn the priestly lore of Egypt. All that is left of

it now is one solitary column, covered with hieroglyphics, to mark the place which, when Joseph knew it, was crowded with temples, palaces, colleges and obelisks, according to the accounts of the Greek historians. One mark of the wealth of the kings is shown in the pyramids built to contain their bodies after death. These pyramids now stand desolate in the sand, but in Joseph's day, they stood out in splendour, huge masses of highly polished granite, now dreary and alone, monuments of departed glory. Round these pyramids grew up temples, buildings of all kinds, busy streets thronged with priests, nobles and soldiers. Each town was a centre of business and of commerce, the one more glorious than the other. The wealth and power of the kings and the hold which idolatry had upon them, may be seen from the monuments which remain to us of their worship. Take for example, the great Sphinx in the pathway leading down from the mountains. This vast figure, half man and half beast, in order to represent both intellect and power, towered aloft and, day by day, between its great paws, each fifty feet in length, might be seen the worshippers thronging into the temples. In it, both the Pharaohs of Moses' day as well as their successors worshipped.

The Buildings of Egypt.

In Memphis are the remains of the huge statue of Rameses the Great, about fifty feet in height. This town was the centre of the bull worship and contained the vast subterranean tomb, in which, for at least 1500 years, the sacred bulls were buried. Leading up to this avenue of the bulls was an avenue of 141 Sphinxes. The tomb itself was a huge vault with great granite sarcophagi in which the embalmed bodies of the sacred bulls were buried. These sarcophagi had been brought 600 miles. We stand and wonder how the Egyptians could possibly, without modern engineering science, have transported these vast blocks of marble and stone from one place to another. It could only have been done by enormous numbers of workmen; how necessary was it for the Pharaohs to insist upon forced labour such as they exacted from the Israelites, in order to

accomplish these works! It is easy also, as we see the pomp and splendour of their bull worship, to understand why the Israelites called upon Aaron to make them a calf. The power of the Egyptian monarchs is perhaps best realized in the great temples at Luxor and at Karnak. The great hall at Karnak is one of the most magnificent, perhaps, of any temples in the world. It has 140 columns of huge pillars, of which the central ones are 34 ft. in circumference and 62 ft. in height. It has been said that the whole design of the hall and of the architecture was to make man feel his littleness and to inspire him with intense awe in the presence of the Deity, and then, by combining the figure of the monarch with that of the Deity, to transfer the awe which was felt for the god to the monarch also. Thus in these temples Pharaoh is represented, "seated amongst the gods, nourished from their breasts, folded in their arms, admitted into familiar intercourse with them." You see the pictures everywhere on the wall, in which Pharaoh is of colossal stature, and his subjects are the size of pygmies. "With one hand he crushes hosts of enemies, with the other he grasps that of his patron and deity." This is the meaning of the phrases, "I am Pharaoh," "By the life of Pharaoh."

When we think of the swift transition by which Joseph was raised from prison to be next in power to a Pharaoh such as one of these, when we think that Pharaoh considered himself almost a god, and that Joseph was next to him, we see that nothing but the strength and grace of God could have steadied his thought and enabled him for his task.

The Injustice of Egypt.

To go back to the story of Joseph. The first start of a lad from his father's home has a spell of interest and romance about it; such immense possibilities lie before him, so much turns upon the first decisions which he makes. But there was little of romance or hope in Joseph's lot as he stood a slave in the market-place, waiting to be purchased by anyone who might wish to buy him. Then came what seemed to be his great chance: he was put into

Potiphar's house, and threw himself into his work with the zeal and earnestness which characterized him everywhere. He was so faithful that everything was left in his hand. But as at home, so here again, his very faithfulness caused his downfall, for a false accusation was made against him. He was cast into prison, and, once there, who could or would deliver him or set him free? The whole world of Egypt would go on unconscious of the helpless Jewish slave boy. Perhaps nothing strikes us more in the story of Joseph than the sweetness of his disposition; blow after blow came upon him, and, instead of resenting the injustice, he went on his way quietly as before. This must have helped to strengthen his natural sweetness of disposition, and have given him the grace which made him so beloved and so powerful in the court of Pharaoh. We do not realize when we fret over injustice or wrong-doing that we are embittering our own character and disposition, taking away from ourselves the charm which might have attracted others to us and enabled us to help them.

When imprisoned, Joseph quietly fitted himself for his daily work, and was as faithful and as capable there as he had been in his father's house or in Potiphar's; and it was not long before the whole care of the prison passed into his hand. The grace of God rested upon him in such measure that the keeper needed not to look to anything that he had put in his charge. Thus Joseph roused himself to work, though work seemed only to bring trouble; and, though hopeless himself, he was ready to help, to sympathize with, and to serve others. He noticed when those around him looked sad, and gave thought and attention to understanding their trouble and to helping them. Also, in all his dealings with the prisoners around him, he was absolutely honest. Thus, whilst it may have been pleasant to him to interpret the dream of the chief butler, it must have been very hard to interpret the baker's dream and to prepare him for his doom.

Preparation for his Life-Work.

Yet, hopeless as his work seemed, there was no place and no way in which Joseph, though he did not know it, could

better have fitted himself for the future. His character lost its early self-absorption by entering into the sorrows and difficulties of his fellow prisoners, and also the knowledge that he gained by intercourse with them was very valuable to him in his later days. As he went up and down in the prison he must have met men of all sorts in the land of Egypt, and as he talked with them he must have got an insight into the difficulties and hardships of the life in each class of society. Above all, when he talked with the chief butler and the baker, two officials very high in Pharaoh's service and kingdom, Joseph must have gained a great insight into the character of Pharaoh and into the working of the Egyptian court. Had he been occupied with himself and his own grievances, had he spent his time, whenever an opportunity offered, in detailing them to others, he would not have learnt all these invaluable lessons about Egyptian life and been ready to take his place in Pharaoh's court. And yet, at the moment, it must have been hard to listen and to sympathize, and he could never have imagined that any benefit could come to him from what he heard. It was afterwards, when he suddenly found himself at the head of affairs, that the knowledge he had gained of the hardships and the grievances of each class of society must have come back to him and been of infinite service in his political life.

A Ray of Hope.

How little Joseph had spoken of himself is evident by the quiet statement which he makes when he asks the butler to remember him. In this statement the strength of his character is revealed. He evidently had not talked about his misfortunes, for he quietly narrates the facts of the case and states his innocence. He makes no accusation whatever against those who have dealt so unjustly with him. All he says is: "I have done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon."

Then comes the great change when the chief butler and the chief baker were taken out of prison, and Joseph was left waiting. It is very hard to realize what the bitterness

of those two years of waiting must have been. To have been confined in a dungeon, and especially one such as this is supposed to have been, must have been intolerable to a shepherd lad used to the freedom of country life. The bright flash of hope that had come across him, with the thought that he might be delivered by the intercession of the butler, must have faded away into a darkness even greater than before. What escape could there be? There was nothing to be hoped for from Potiphar. There was nothing to be hoped for from the gaoler of the prison ; he could not serve him more faithfully than he had done. There was nothing to be hoped for from the prisoners.

Recognition and Reward.

The three words "but forgat him" fall with a heavy thud that seems to show the dull aching behind them. Nevertheless Joseph continued quietly to learn his daily lesson as it came to him from the hand of God. As he learnt it his character grew in strength and power ; he did each duty as it came. He forgot self in others, and did not waste his strength in grieving over the injustice and forgetfulness of the world. He had one bright light, and that light is contained in the words, "the Lord was with Joseph." Day by day, in prison, he learned to know the presence of God in a way that kept him from falling when the darkness of the prison was left, and he had passed into the light and dazzling brightness of the court of Pharaoh.

LESSON XX.

GENESIS XLI.

A SWIFT TRANSITION.

THE story changes now from the hopelessness of a prison to a day of gloom in Pharaoh's court. Joseph within that prison was far less hopeless than Pharaoh upon his throne, and it was his hand, the hand of a helpless prisoner, which was outstretched to save both the king and his court.

Fourteen years had passed since Joseph had been cast down into prison, and two years since Pharaoh's butler returned to the court promising to effect his release, yet day after day had gone by without change or release. Had God forgotten to be gracious. Pharaoh upon his birthday had two dreams which forewarned him as monarch and as ruler of the future state of his kingdom. He understood that there was something mysterious and full of portent in his dream, but what it was he could not tell.

The dream is essentially Egyptian, and centred around the Egyptian gods. The kine, worshipped by the Egyptians, come up from feeding in the sacred river. The favour of the gods seems to rest upon them. They are well-favoured and full-fleshed, but seven lean kine follow them, and the lean kine devour the fat. The second dream is like the first. The gods have been most merciful. The river Nile has well overflowed its banks, and the ears of corn are thick and good. But again the change comes swiftly; the east wind sweeps over the country, and the thin ears devour the full ears. We

who know the interpretation wonder why Pharaoh and his wise men did not at once guess the signification. But the very simplicity points to the faithfulness of the story.

Much has recently been discovered about the magicians. They were a separate class, and had the official right of divination and interpretation, and their very incantations and amulets have been found. They seem to have been on that strange borderland between the known and the unknown, and to have dealt with it in all good faith. They were divided into two classes, the magicians and the wise men, who were in charge of the magical books. When called upon by Pharaoh, they appealed to this borderland of the unknown, but could get no answer, and consequently could give him none, hence the trouble of the king and of the court.

The Speech of the Chief Butler.

The close of the last chapter had been very sad. Joseph's entreaty to the chief butler, "Think on me when it shall be well with thee," resulting only in "yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgat him." One can almost see the longing look in Joseph's eye, the searching glance with which he made his request. The chief butler, overjoyed at the thought of his freedom, would probably give a very ready response, and owing to his own happiness would have a kindness of manner which would make it seem impossible that he could forget the man who had waited on him and cheered him through the days of his imprisonment. But he went his way, and then followed the weary waiting time. Joseph at first would expect, hour by hour, then day by day, that he would be sent for. He would start at every sound, at every call. Then as the delay continued, he would begin to make explanation for it. The chief butler was busy with his neglected work, he was waiting a fit opportunity, and so forth. At last we can see the dying down of hope, the consciousness that the butler, like all other earthly friends, had failed him, and lastly, the settling back to the one rock of strength, to the one presence, which, despite the mysteriousness of its dealing

was and could be his only help. How bitter this part of his experience was we find from the expression in the Psalms ; the “iron entered into his soul.” When we think of Joseph in prison, we wonder how the chief butler could have forgotten him ; but when we think of the chief butler, we see that it was easy enough. He was happy in his reunion with his friends, anxious over the cares of his office, which he would be more zealous than ever to fulfil. Besides this, there would be a feeling of uneasiness at anything which recalled the days of his disgrace and his imprisonment. He was unwilling to remind Pharaoh of it by making any request for a former fellow-prisoner, and he may have been unwilling to have Joseph or anyone near him who could recall his prison days. It is easy to forget those who are below us or whom we have left behind in life’s race, but our neglected friendships as well as our neglected duties in their own time rise up against us. When Pharaoh’s dream distressed him, the thought of his own dream and of the days of his imprisonment came with a rush over the chief butler, and he acknowledged his fault, and Joseph was sent for out of prison. Still he stands marked out in Holy Scripture as the warning and type of an ungrateful and careless friend. It is quite true that God’s purpose was better carried out by the two years’ delay. If Joseph had been brought out of prison any sooner, he would probably have been given a position in another part of Egypt, or freedom to return home, and thus not have been available for the interpretation of Pharaoh’s dream. But this does not alter the forgetfulness of the butler, and his name has gone down to all time as an example of those who take help in their hour of need and then forget their deliverer. “Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city ; yet no man remembered that same poor man” (Ecclesiastes, ix. 15).

Joseph being brought out of Prison.

How graphic is the description of the 14th verse, “They made him run hastily out of the dungeon.” He is shaved in order that he may stand in the Egyptian court. Among

the Hebrews it was a disgrace to be shaved, but now Joseph must be prepared to stand before Pharaoh; and one can almost see Pharaoh and the whole court, in breathless suspense, waiting for his words. Then the hour of temptation came upon Joseph. He had apparently been forgotten of God, and God's hand seemed to have been against him despite the innocence of his life and conduct. Why not now take to himself the credit for wisdom, make himself a great name, and hope that Pharaoh would release him? But the same spirit of God spoke through Joseph which spoke through Daniel. There was a dignity and power in his words, "It is not in me; God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace." So great is the quiet strength of conviction in Joseph's words, that we find both Pharaoh and his court ascribing to God, and to God alone, the glory of the interpretation of the dream.

Joseph in the Court.

God has forewarned Pharaoh of his danger, and has repeated the dream twice as a sign of warning and of certainty. The dream comes from the eternal decrees of God, and God is bringing the fulfilment very near. Counsel is given by the wisdom of God. A tax is to be imposed, one which will not be felt throughout the country owing to the abundance of the harvest; and by means of that tax, all within the country will become servants of Pharaoh, and dependent upon him as their over-lord and their saviour from famine. Then follows the hasty consultation between Pharaoh and his leading ministers.

There must have been a nobility and a dignity about Joseph which bespoke the spirit of God within him. It was recognized by these men, idolaters as they were. In all ages there have been certain men and women who from their personal knowledge of and intercourse with God have gained a nobility, peace and dignity which distinguishes them above their fellows, and it was the dignity of this kind which impressed Pharaoh and his court whilst Joseph was speaking. Joseph feared the face of no man, because he feared the face of God. He was one accustomed to speaking to

the King of kings, and dwelling in thought with Him, and he could not be confused by the presence of an earthly king or courtier.

Sudden Exaltation of Joseph.

Pharaoh, after the impulsive manner of eastern monarchs, raises Joseph at once to the highest dignity. He will have command, not only over the people of the land, but also over the household of Pharaoh himself. He is to be next to the king, indeed in some respects above the king in power. He has the ring of authority put on his hand ; the fine linen of the priesthood, showing his divine power as well as his royal power ; the gold chain, showing the majesty of the king ; and this divinity and majesty are to be acknowledged wherever he goes. Pharaoh, who himself in the statutes of the country was represented as the companion of the gods and conversing with them, decrees that without Joseph none shall lift hand or foot in all the land of Egypt. That is to say, he will exercise no royal power without the concurrence of Joseph ; and in order to confirm his spiritual power, Joseph is united in marriage to the daughter of the priest of On. The high priest, Poti-pherah, of On was reckoned next to the king in Egypt, and Joseph, in marrying his daughter, was admitted to the royal family.

Joseph as Ruler.

Joseph, as ruler, conducted himself with the same simplicity with which he had conducted himself when first summoned to the court. And here we see how the fire of tribulation, through which he had passed, had purified and ennobled his spirit. When he was a lad among his brethren, he had been inclined to think highly of himself, and to speak of the great future which lay before him ; but now every touch of this is gone. The record is a simple one. He went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt gathering up food, and preparing for the famine. In other words, instead of dwelling in the palace, and enjoying the magnificence of the court, he gave his whole thought and mind to the work committed to him.

Yet, wherever he was, whether at his work, or in the palace, the thought of his home and his God remained with him. Thus, he calls his two sons by Hebrew names, not Egyptian ones, and in the name of his first son he acknowledges that all that has come to him, has come from the hand of God, who is comforting him for his toil and for the loss of his father's house. In the name of his second son he again reminds himself that he has received all the wealth and the fruitfulness that he now enjoys from the hand of God.

One wonders sometimes why he did not send for his father, or, at any rate, let him know that he was still alive. We cannot tell what his reasons were, but, in the first place, he could not send a message to his home and tell his father that he was yet alive, without accusing his brethren ; and, in the second place, he knew that it was foretold by God, that his father and his brethren would one day bow themselves before him. Also he may have thought that the same God who was working out his own salvation, and that of Egypt, would in due time work out also the fulfilment of his dreams and unite him once more with his father and his father's house.

The Years of Famine.

Then came the terrible famine. How terrible, we in western countries cannot realize, although, year by year, accounts of like famines come to us from India or China. If famines are to be dreaded now-a-days, despite all the facilities of transportation, and all the wealth of the world, what must they have been in the days of Joseph? It could only have been by the most strenuous effort, and the preparation of many years that he could deal safely with a discontented court and a people rebellious from poverty and famine ; but, by his wise policy and by his statesmanlike measures, he not only kept the people from distress, but he also laid the foundation of a far greater and more powerful kingdom, a kingdom in which there was something of a feudal spirit, a mutual dependence and wise taxation.

As we reach this point in Joseph's story, we cannot help stopping, for we see in it so many shadows that remind us

of the life of Christ. Joseph was rejected by his brethren, sold for money, cast into prison ; he preached deliverance in prison as Jesus preached to the spirits who were in prison ; he ministered to his two fellow prisoners, as Christ did to the two thieves on the cross ; he was rejected of men, yet raised to supreme power ; the saviour of his country and all the surrounding land ; giving bread to dying nations, as Christ gave to the world the Bread of Life. And the shadows go beyond present history. They even tell us of what will be in the far-off hereafter. As Joseph's brethren came to him for forgiveness, so one day will the Jews come to Jesus, will bend before Him and acknowledge Him as their Saviour.

LESSON XXI.

GENESIS XLII.

THE MEETING AFTER MANY YEARS.

JOSEPH, when a lad, had dreamed that the sun, moon and eleven stars would make obeisance to him. Twenty-two years had passed since the night of that dream, and the fulfilment still seemed far away. For the first thirteen years each event as it happened seemed to mock the memory of the dream, and Joseph, instead of subduing others or taking the lead over them, had sunk step by step deeper into the mire of distress. Then all was changed ; Joseph was made the lord of all Egypt, and the inhabitants had to bow the knee before him. But the dream itself was unfulfilled. He could not have forgotten it, for we saw in the last lesson that he was a Hebrew still at heart, and wished his sons to be Hebrews also, and in the present chapter we see that Joseph understood his destiny, understood that the vision was from God, and understood further that he as a servant of God had so to deal with his brothers that the dream might be fulfilled in the spirit as well as in the letter. This is the keynote of what follows.

The Embassy of the Ten Brothers.

One wonders whether Joseph, knowing that the famine had spread to other lands, had foreseen the method by which God would fulfil his revelation, and whether day by day, as the representatives of the surrounding countries came in, he lifted up his eyes and watched and waited for the coming of his brethren. It does seem strange that they should not

at once have decided to buy corn in Egypt. They were comparatively young men, adventurous and spirited. Surely in the natural course of events they would themselves have been the first to suggest buying the corn, and undertaking the journey, whereas although they felt the need, as Jacob expressed it, they "only looked the one upon the other." It seems as though Egypt were a land they did not want to go to. It may have been that they were conscious of their sin in selling Joseph and sending him there, and, therefore, they shrank from it. However this may be, it is Jacob who suggests that the ten brothers should go down to Egypt and buy food for all. As he speaks to them the thought of Joseph is ever present with him, whether his brothers have forgotten him or not, for he will not allow Benjamin to go with them, "Lest peradventure mischief befall him."

The meeting of the Brothers.

We can almost see the busy scene, the market crowded with buyers from the surrounding countries, many of them, doubtless, bearing the marks of famine ; and Joseph standing above all, not dealing out the corn himself, but having the more important embassies and requests presented to him. Joseph was probably dressed in the long white tunic, and wearing the gold chain, the tunic having been given to him as a symbol of authority over all the men of that vast kingdom, just as in days gone by his coat had been a symbol of authority over his brethren. He was probably further distinguished by his bearing, and by his general appearance; for he may have inherited the beauty of his mother, and we gather that it was so, for we find over and over again that there was something about him which distinguished him from his fellows. All his life through he had taken the precedence, as well over his brethren as in Potiphar's house, and again in prison, and then lastly over the whole realm of Egypt.

It is not wonderful that his brothers did not recognize him. He was shaved like the Egyptians, and probably his dress and bearing were far more those of an Egyptian than of a Hebrew, and very far away from their

recollection of the shepherd lad such as he was when they last saw him. You can see him standing there with a keen eye watching the crowds, ever on the alert and possibly hoping against hope that his brethren might come. How quickly he would recognize the ten well-remembered faces, and what a strange thrill must have passed through him at the sight of them. At the same time he remembered his dream, and must have made up his mind as to the line which he was to pursue; and that line, as we see later on, was one of real affection towards his father and towards his brethren, however hard it seemed to be at first. Two things were absolutely necessary, partly for their own sakes, partly for the working out of the will of God; before he could protect and shelter them by bringing them down into Egypt, they must show that they had repented of their sin, and they must prove that their repentance was real by the way in which they resisted a similar temptation.

Repentance.

Repentance is not so much sorrow for the past as an entire change of conduct for the future.

Joseph's brethren were to be tested by their conduct towards Benjamin. If they showed that they would treat Benjamin in the right way as they ought to have treated Joseph, then that would be a proof that they were sorry for their deed and that their hearts were changed.

It was very necessary that there should be this change of disposition, if Joseph were to bring them down into Egypt. If he brought Benjamin then his father and his brethren would come also, but when they came he knew they must come not merely as his brethren, but as his subjects. Joseph's rank and his duty to Pharaoh required that all who were in the country should be under his protection and subject to him. This explains a line of conduct which otherwise might seem strange.

The Awakening of Conscience.

Thus when Joseph first sees his brethren he speaks hardly to them, and puts them practically in the same

position in which they had put him when he was in Dothan. He charges them with being spies, just as in days of old they had charged him with being a spy also. He refuses to listen to their words, and thrusts them into prison, just as they had not heard his cry and had put him in the pit. But he tempers his actions with mercy, and above all he wakens in them the consciousness that God is dealing with them. This awakening in them of the consciousness of God is another step towards leading them to repentance. If they can be aroused to a sense of their sin before God, and feel that the judgment of God is overtaking them, then real repentance will follow. Hence Joseph, instead of keeping the nine men in prison, releases them on the third day, and as he does so he tells them that it is because he fears God. He gives them corn, and says that Benjamin must be brought down into Egypt. The brothers are troubled, not merely on account of their present difficulty, but because their consciences are aroused, and memory is awakened. They seem to hear the cry of their brother, to see the anguish of his soul. They know that this trouble has fallen upon them because of their sin, and as they speak one to another they confess that they know why this distress has come upon them. In their present anguish they learn what his anguish had been; and the failure of their words to move the governor of the land recalls the entreaty of Joseph to which they were deaf. As they speak one to another and Reuben confirms their words, Joseph turns away and leaves them. He did not weep when he first caught sight of them after so many years, but he does weep at the first sign of a change of conduct in them, and he has to go apart in order to gain control over himself and strength to enable him to continue the severity of his conduct towards them. This shows his true love for his brethren.

Then Simeon is bound not Reuben, for Reuben had endeavoured to save Joseph, but Simeon, the next in age, and the one who all through seems to have been the leader in sin, is kept a prisoner and given opportunity to think over his past sin.

Joseph, a Type of Christ.

Joseph, as he dealt thus with his brethren, foreshadowed the dealing of Christ with His servants. Our hearts turn naturally to evil, and it is often through the path of suffering and of punishment that we are brought to know God and to be sorry for our sins. But the hand that punishes, like that of Joseph, is the hand that loves ; and the eye that sees all watches as keenly as the eye of Joseph when he watched his brethren, and as strongly desires change of heart and conduct. The very severity of our trouble and of our punishment may be the signs that God is wishing to recall us to Him, just as Joseph was striving to recall his brethren.

The Return of the Brethren and their further Awakening.

Joseph had given the command to put each man's money in his sack. This was partly his royal bounty towards them ; he could give them no sign of affection whilst they were with him, but he will take nothing from them ; it was partly also because he wished them to feel that they were dealing with a mysterious power which they must obey. These signs of strangeness and mystery specially troubled and perplexed them, and their hearts failed them at finding the money. Was the anger of God aroused against them for their sin ? Was God giving this harsh governor a claim upon them so that he could further ill-use them ? And Jacob, when they returned to him, was equally troubled over the finding of the money. In the inn they may have opened only one sack, but their dismay was increased when they returned home and found all the bundles of money, and their father when he looked at them was equally afraid. Very sorrowful was his lament : " Me have ye bereaved of my children ; Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away ; all these things are against me."

LESSON XXII.

GENESIS XLIII.—XLIV.

THE CUP OF DIVINATION.

Judah the Leader among his Brethren.

The famine continued to be heavy upon the land of Egypt, and upon all the surrounding nations. The sons of Jacob had been unwilling to go into Egypt on the first occasion, but they were still more unwilling to go now, for it was not simply a question of reluctance, it was one of absolute impossibility. How could they ask their father to let Benjamin go with them? How could they take the risk of evil to Benjamin himself? Therefore, they waited until their father bade them buy food, and then Judah stood out as their spokesman; he seems to have risen, by his character, to be the leader among his brethren. There is a dignity and strength in his character, which, from his early story, and that of his brothers, is unexpected. He reasons quietly, but decisively, with his father. What he says contrasts with the impulsive speech of Reuben. Reuben had told his father he could slay his two sons if harm befel Benjamin ; as if there could be any satisfaction to Jacob in the slaughter of two of his grand-children. But Judah speaks very differently, and understands far better how to deal with his father. He offers to be surety for his brother, and if harm comes to him to let lasting blame rest upon himself.

The Sending of Benjamin.

Then Jacob seems to come to himself, and we see a touch of the man we knew in former years beside the brook

Jabbok. There, finding himself in a great strait, he had propitiated Esau by a present ; now he seeks to deal in the same way with the Governor of Egypt. "A man's gift maketh room for him," Proverbs, xviii. 16. The present which he told his sons to take with them was small in itself, but, nevertheless, it was an acceptable one at a time of famine. He told them also to take double money with them, so that they might be entirely in the right. They were not to take advantage of the money which had been returned to them, whether it had been given to them purposely, or placed there by mistake. They are to assume that it was an oversight, and they are to show the honesty of their intentions by restoring it as it was given to them. Last of all, and most precious of all, he lets them take Benjamin. But there is something deeper lying behind all these directions. Jacob seems to be wrestling in prayer with God about the matter, just as he wrestled alone on that night long ago. And this second time too, he seems to have come out victorious, for he consents to let Benjamin go, and believes that they will return, not because of the integrity of Judah, or because of the plans that he has made, but because of his trust in God, who will help him now as He did in the former extremity. If not, and the lad does not return, then it is fate, and as such it must be met. The anguish of his soul comes out in the last sentence. "If I be bereaved, I am bereaved."

The Meeting in the Market Place.

Once again the men stand in the market-place in Egypt, and Joseph catches sight of them, and of one whom, though he left him a child of a year old, he can tell is his brother Benjamin.

Joseph again gives directions that his brethren shall be taken into his house and preparations made for them. The brethren are alarmed. Once again their sin rises up against them. Again the feeling of awe ; the thought that God is dealing in a mysterious manner with them. They are also naturally astonished at treatment so different from what they had expected. They are convinced this time,

that, for some unknown reason, the governor of the country is seeking a quarrel against them, and they try to explain about the money. The steward calms their fears, he tells them that he had their money, and restores Simeon to them.

The Meeting in the House.

It is a touching scene when Joseph meets them in the house. The dream of many years is fulfilled. With an offering in their hands, they bow themselves once again to the ground. But Joseph's thoughts are very far away from finding pleasure in their obeisance or in his own exaltation. Touched, probably, by the sight of the homely fruits which they had brought, and which must have vividly recalled the days of his boyhood, touched infinitely more by the presence of Benjamin, his one longing is to get news of his father, to assure himself that the lad is really Benjamin, and to give him a greeting and a blessing from God. We see here how the years of adversity have purified and ennobled the character of Joseph. When he dreamed his dream there probably was excitement in the thought that his brothers would, one day, have to bend before him; but when the time came for it to be fulfilled, his one emotion is a yearning love for his father and his brethren. He has found out what the real things in life are, and the glitter of vanity and pride has no attraction for him. He cannot even contain himself; overcome by the sight of Benjamin, and doubtless with the vivid recollection of his mother Rachel and of his father, he breaks down and weeps again and again. But still the time has not yet come when he can reveal himself: his brothers have not yet given proof of an entire change of spirit. When the meal is prepared Joseph sits apart from them, according to Egyptian custom, but he gives orders that the men shall sit according to their age, and the youngest last. Another touch of mysterious awe must have fallen upon them. How could the Egyptian governor or his servants know the right order in which to place them? How could they know that the youngest son was the one preferred at home? Why should they send him

five times as much as themselves, an acknowledged sign of royalty? But, overcome with relief at so favourable a reception, they drank and were merry, and next morning they went joyfully on their way. They had succeeded beyond all expectation. Simeon was returning with them; Benjamin was safe. They had as much food as they could carry, and were free to return to their father.

The Question of True Repentance.

But the purpose of God was not yet ended; that is to say, the bringing them to a heartfelt repentance, and it is this purpose which explains the dealing of Joseph. If Joseph wished to bring his father and his brethren into Egypt, and to let them dwell there, then for their own sakes, as well as for his, they must be put once again into a position almost identical with the former one; that is to say, they must again be incensed against their favoured younger brother. It must be to their interest to get rid of him; and they must show that, although it is so, they will not, no matter what the after consequences, be guilty of the sin, but will rather give their lives to save the life of their youngest brother and to shield their father from distress. The men who brought the bloody coat to Jacob must this time be willing to shed their life-blood sooner than that he should suffer.

The Accusation.

With this thought in mind the chapter becomes plain. Joseph, in common with other Egyptian magnates, had in his possession what was called a silver cup of divination; that is to say, a bowl which was filled with water, and in which coming events were supposed to be mirrored, generally after some gold or gem had been thrown into the bowl. This cup was hidden in Benjamin's sack, and the steward overtook the men and accused them of the basest ingratitude. How could they, who have been treated beyond all possible deserts, have rewarded evil for good, have partaken of the governor's hospitality, and yet have stolen, not only a bowl of intrinsic value, but also what among the Egyptians meant the secret of the power of the governor? If the

governor were deprived of this method of foreseeing the future, how could he rule his kingdom with success? It is an immaterial matter to us to know whether Joseph really used the bowl for this purpose or not. Most probably he did not. Certainly he had not when he interpreted Pharaoh's dreams, and again we know that when the bowl was taken from him he said: "Suppose ye not that such a man as I can certainly divine?"

The Temptation to Desert Benjamin.

Then follows the dismay of the brothers, and their protestations of innocence, and, lastly, the finding of the cup in Benjamin's sack. What could they do? Should they abandon him to his fate? Everything seemed to be against him. Had he yielded to temptation and stolen the cup, as his mother had stolen the idols from Laban? If so, why should they protect him? In any case, it was impossible to clear him of the charge. What claim had he upon them? They would not be guilty in the sense in which they were guilty when they delivered Joseph. Joseph had been innocent; Benjamin, in appearance at any rate, was guilty. His father had favoured Benjamin as much, if not more, than ever he had favoured Joseph. Indeed, they and their wives and children had almost been starved sooner than that Benjamin's life should be risked. Why should not his life have been risked as much as any of theirs? If they saved Benjamin, both Jacob and all their families might perish with hunger, whilst they were detained or killed to satisfy the just wrath of the governor. But they had pledged themselves that no harm should happen to their brother; and therefore, with sorrowful hearts, all the brothers returned to the city.

When they returned to Joseph's house a second opportunity to desert Benjamin and gain their own safety is given to them. Joseph thoroughly understood the position of affairs, and he paves the way for them by singling out Benjamin, and saying that it is a mere matter of justice that they should all go in peace and he who had taken the cup be kept. Then Judah draws near, and makes that wonderful

and touching appeal which is one of the most exquisite prayers in the Bible. Luther said it was a perfect model of prayer. "Would," said he, "that I could intercede with God for others as Judah interceded for Benjamin, and, as I thank God, Christ has interceded for me, just as, like Judah, He became bondman for me." If the prayer comes with such a touching appeal to us, what must it have sounded like to Joseph, whose heart was already overflowing with grief and with longing, and who understood and could follow each word of the petition only too well.

The Reconciliation.

Judah's pleading was all for his father, and Joseph could realize what the grief of Jacob had been at his loss when he saw how much these rough and reckless men had felt it, and how they shrank from bringing a fresh touch of the same sorrow upon him. Lastly, Judah offers to give his life for Benjamin, and says that it would be far better to abide forever in Egypt than to witness another outbreak of so terrible a grief. Little wonder that Joseph could no longer restrain himself. Dismissing all save his brethren, his long pent-up love for his father and his joy at the entire change of spirit in his brethren broke forth, so that, although none were present, the sound of his weeping was heard outside the house, and the report went even to the palace of Pharaoh.

Then come the exquisite words in which Joseph reveals himself to his brethren, exquisite because of their simplicity. He tells them that he is Joseph, but at the same time relieves their fear by showing that the thought of his father is the one thing that is present with him. They stand awestruck in his presence. Now that he speaks they can doubtless see the Hebrew cast of feature, the fairer complexion, and recognize that he is indeed their brother. But that he should have forgiven them seems to be almost impossible ; that he should draw them nearer to him, that he should call himself their brother, that he should be willing to own them and to offer them comfort. The last touch comes when he lets them know that the hand of

God is working in everything that has happened. He lifts them, as it were, away from the presence of man and into the presence of God, and shows them that it is because he has seen and recognized the hand of God in all that has happened that he is willing to pardon what they have done.

LESSON XXIII.

GENESIS XLV.

IT IS ENOUGH.

The Accused.

The forty-fifth chapter of Genesis opens with a strange scene. On the one side we see Benjamin accused of a theft of the most daring and ungrateful description, and the accusation supported by such strong circumstantial evidence that it seemed impossible to clear him. Indeed, from the account in the Scriptures, it is not clear that even his brethren believed in his innocence. Any punishment, even death, might be before him. Whether he were guilty or not, Judah, for the sake of his father and for the memory of Joseph, had gone surety for him, and had offered to give his life for Benjamin's life. But beyond the accusation itself, all the brothers must have felt that there was some strange and mysterious power working around them, sometimes for them, sometimes against them, but, whichever way they turned, bringing their former sin to remembrance, and entangling them so that there seemed no way of escape.

The Accuser.

On the other side we see Joseph, the governor of the land, their accuser and their judge; instead of sending them to instant death, he bids all bystanders depart, and when he is alone gives way to uncontrollable weeping. It was the breaking up of the depths of a strong nature, which had been repressed and isolated for twenty-two years. It

was true that Joseph had learned to live alone, and to do his work apart from those whom he had loved. This isolation had taught him to lean more directly on God, and, to trace out the way in which God was leading him. But from time to time there are signs in his story which show that the iron of the old injustice and cruelty had entered into his soul, although, despite all that had passed, it had not changed his love for his father or his goodwill towards his brethren.

He hears again, what must have been dear to him beyond belief, the words telling him of the unchangeable love of his father. As his brethren speak, he knows that although his father's life is bound up in Benjamin, the secret of that love is the underlying yearning of his soul for Joseph. To this deepest assurance of his father's love is added the knowledge that his brothers have repented of their sin; that the way is opened by God so that all can be united again. The sudden realization brings relief beyond the power of control. You can see him turn, trembling with emotion, to tell his brethren that he is Joseph, and passionately entreating them to let him hear again the words which tell him that his father is yet alive.

Little wonder that they cannot answer him; all that they are conscious of is that their ever-present haunting sin has found them out. If Zaphnath-paaneah were terrible, how much more terrible is Joseph with all the knowledge of their attempted sin and murder?

Joseph's Treatment of his Brethren.

But Joseph draws near again to them with peculiar tenderness. He tells them once more that he is their brother. He bids them "Go up to my father and say unto him, thus saith thy son Joseph." He not only owns his kinship, but he seems to rejoice in it. "My brother Benjamin." "My father." He knows how to bring them greater comfort than their kinship, by leading them away from themselves and into a higher atmosphere, passing over their quarrels and past treatment of him. He shows them that what he is thinking about is the way in which God has

over-ruled and directed all circumstances, so that they have worked together for good to them and to Egypt. It is this lifting of the whole matter above themselves, and putting it into the over-ruling hand of God, which makes the beauty and dignity of his dealing with his brothers. He does not excuse their sin—that is a matter between God and them—but he does tell them to look beyond their sin to the God who has over-ruled it, and he points out to them that it is because he is fulfilling the will of God that he himself is full of love and mercy towards them. They are to come down to Egypt, where he will make them a grant of a part of the country most suited to them. He will be their saviour and protector, and they may have the great joy of telling their father the wonder of it all, and bidding him rejoice with them.

A Swift Transition.

What a sudden change passes over the whole scene. The brothers, who had been trembling before the judgment-seat of the governor of the country, who had expected to have to return to their father and tell him that either Judah or Benjamin was lost to him for ever, can now go free, and bear the good news that Joseph is found, and that all the glory of Egypt is his.

The only mention which Joseph makes of the glory of his position is when he thinks of it in connection with his father. He cares for the honour that has come to him for two reasons. First, because he has been able to save Egypt as well as his father's house; and, secondly, because of the joy that it will bring to his aged father. Good would it be for us if, as God gives us work to do and lays fresh responsibilities upon us, our first thought were not of the self-advancement that comes with them, but of the hope that through them we may serve our generation and help those who are dependent on us.

As Joseph spoke, his brethren doubtless traced the family likeness, and, inspired by his words, were comforted and drawn nearer to him. His first embrace was naturally for Benjamin. Little wonder that Benjamin wept upon Joseph's

neck. A few minutes before he was a condemned culprit ; now he is a longed-for brother. His brothers also received the kiss of forgiveness, and, calmed by Joseph's treatment, were able to talk to him.

The Royal Protection.

Meantime, the report of what had passed had spread to Pharaoh's palace, and Joseph's action was confirmed by that of Pharaoh. If our sins bring punishment upon others as well as upon ourselves, so also upright and unselfish work brings blessing upon those who are nearest and dearest to us. Wherever Joseph had been he had found favour in the eyes of those who had employed him—his father, Potiphar, the keeper of the prison, and Pharaoh. Now for the first time this favour can be extended, and he becomes the saviour of his father's household and of his brethren.

Pharaoh bids all the brothers come down into Egypt, and promises, for Joseph's sake, to protect and help them. They all received royal gifts, and Benjamin those which marked him out as the chosen brother. Joseph is not afraid to give these gifts to Benjamin, for he has tested his brethren, and knows that they will not be jealous of him, but that they will rejoice with him. Then to his father is sent abundant provision for all that he may need until he comes down to Egypt. His father had sent balm, honey, nuts, and almonds to one who was in control of the wealth of the greatest kingdom of the world, and we know how tenderly his gift was received. It reminds us of the Magi bringing to Christ gold, frankincense and myrrh, and it fills us with joy to think that all who are Christ's servants are allowed to give to Him gifts, and can feel assured of a like acceptance. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me."

Then Joseph dismisses his brethren, but as they pass away from his presence he gives them a warning. "See that ye fall not out by the way." He knew well their nature, and that although these rough men were for the

moment hushed and softened by his presence and by his love, yet in this extreme moment of their excitement, when they were once released from his presence, their old habits of reproach and recrimination might burst forth again, and burst forth all the more bitterly because their hearts were filled with remorse for the wrong which they had done.

Joseph's desire is that the same spirit of love which has been inspired by his presence may remain amongst them as they go upon their homeward journey.

The Return to Jacob.

Jacob had been left alone, and we can more easily imagine than describe how great the trial of his faith must have been, as day by day passed away and still his sons did not return. It was not only the loss of his sons, it was that in them was bound up the whole future of the race, the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham, to Isaac, and to himself. As day by day passed, and he watched for the first signal of their return, his heart-sickness must have become greater and greater, and when at last they were seen coming, and appeared before him and told him their wonderful story, it is a true touch of nature that his heart fainted, and he could not believe them. Any of us who has suffered relief after long and hopeless suspense knows how true the whole account is ; knows too how it was that until he saw the waggons he could not believe their story. When joy seems beyond belief we crave for something we can touch, something we can see, as a token of its truth, and he who had been deceived by his sons, and had believed when he saw the bloody coat, does indeed need the sight of Benjamin, enriched with all his presents, the joyful looks of the brothers, and still more than these, the thoughtfulness for himself, which was signified by the waggons which had been sent to bring him into Egypt. The whole desire of Jacob's heart is for Joseph, just as in years gone by it had been for Rachel. When he comes to himself there is no thought of the preservation of himself, and his whole household from famine ; no thought of the glory of Egypt, or of the honour

that Joseph has accumulated. Joseph, his son, is yet alive, he will see him before he dies.

Journey of Jacob.

And so Israel sets out on his journey, and at Beer-sheba he makes a halt. Before leaving the country he must offer sacrifice, and seek the face of God, because the step which he is taking is a great and momentous one, and it is needful to know how far God's blessing will rest upon him as he takes it.

Abraham had been told to leave all, and to wander in the land of Canaan, and when he had left Canaan and strayed into the land of Egypt, little blessing had come upon him for doing so. Isaac had been forbidden to leave Canaan, and Jacob, after a perilous journey, had with difficulty made his way back to Canaan, and remained there, believing that it was God's will for him that he should sojourn there, and that his seed would afterwards inherit the whole country when the iniquity of the Amorites was full.

Jacob may have known of the prophecy given to Abraham, he may have heard how the light of God moved between the sacrifice during the night watches, and wondered why his seed would go into Egypt, and remain there for four hundred years. But although he may have known this it was right, and in keeping with his character, that he should stop at Beer-sheba, and draw near to God at the place in which Abraham had met God. It was also close to Bethel where Jacob had received his first vision of God, and where God had spoken to him on his return from his journey, and had accepted him as He had before accepted Abraham. Now another vision is given, and God tells Jacob that it is His will that this journey should be undertaken ; that He will be with him in Egypt, and will make of his seed a great nation. He promises further that His presence will go down with him, and in the course of time will surely bring him, that is to say his seed, up again. And lastly, reading into the deepest thought of Jacob's heart, He tells him that his desire will be granted. Joseph shall put his hands upon his eyes ; shall perform for Jacob the last rites of the eldest son.

He will close his father's eyes in death, or in other words, he will be beside his father during his helpless old age and dying days, and will not leave him until his soul has passed away to God.

After this Jacob rose up and went down into Egypt in full confidence, he and all belonging to him.

Once again we see a prophecy of the future. As Joseph is reconciled to his brethren, so the Jews will finally be reconciled to Christ. We see that although they are still like Joseph's brethren, punished for their sin, cast off, troubled and in spiritual famine, yet we believe God's love is by these very means slowly working out a change in their whole attitude, and drawing them back to Him. His face is still turned away like Joseph's face, but one day it shall be said to Jerusalem, "Fear not, the Lord thy God is in the midst of thee. He will rejoice over thee with joy," "He will make with thee a covenant of peace."

LESSON XXIV.

GENESIS XLVI. XLVII. XLVIII.

A GOOD MAN'S BLESSING.

The Meeting of Jacob and Joseph.

With what keen joy must Jacob have approached the land of Goshen. He was to see Joseph, from whom he had been separated for twenty years, and whom he loved with the depth of affection of which his strong nature was capable. He had received afresh the blessing of God upon his descendants, and knew that his sojourn was ordained of God. There was to be salvation for himself, and for all those who were dependent upon him, during the coming years of famine. With what joy, too, must Judah have gone forward to prepare the way, and to tell Joseph that Jacob was coming, for it was largely through the courage and self-sacrifice of Judah that the union had been brought about.

We can picture the great longing with which Jacob, day by day, felt the distance growing less between him and Joseph; and, when the two met, Jacob, weary and travel-stained with his journey, Joseph in his royal chariot, with all the state of the second governor in Egypt, everything else was forgotten, there was only one thought on either side, and that was the joy of reunion. Joseph presented himself in lowly reverence before Jacob, fell on his neck, and clung to him with weeping, and Jacob at last found words to express his feeling; he was satisfied: "Now let me die since I have seen thy face." The same satisfaction and answer to deep longing was expressed by Simeon: "Lord, now

lestest Thou Thy servant depart in peace," when he had seen Christ, the Saviour of the world.

The Settling of the Israelites in the Land of Goshen.

The strength of Joseph's character comes out in the able manner in which he planned for the safe-keeping and comfort of his father and brethren. Pharaoh had bidden them come to Egypt, but an Eastern monarch is changeable. If they were to be kept in safety, they must be given a land where they could be separate, and where they would have room to expand, as well as opportunity for supporting themselves. Of all the districts in the land of Egypt, that of Goshen was the most favourable for this purpose. In the first place it was not exclusively Egyptian; there were already many foreigners there. If the Israelites gave themselves out at once as shepherds, they would be able to keep separate from the Egyptians, because the Egyptians hated and despised the occupation of shepherding. Therefore Joseph instructed his brethren as to what they were to say when called into the presence of Pharaoh. And Joseph, himself, without loss of time, approached Pharaoh and told him that his brothers had come, and took five of them with him in order to present them to Pharaoh. There must have been a strange contrast between the brothers—Joseph skilled in the learning and statesmanship of Egypt, and the five shepherd brothers, bearing the mark of their outdoor life and exposure to the sun. But far greater than the difference in outer appearance was the difference in the inner character of the men. Joseph was distinguished by the nobility of his character, as was seen when he was not ashamed to call them brethren. In the face of the court and king he owns them, and claims that some of the favour which he has won from Pharaoh may be transferred to them. His request is granted, and more than granted, for Pharaoh is willing to give them as well as the land the charge of his vast herds of cattle.

The Presentation of Jacob to Pharaoh.

Pharaoh then desired to meet Jacob, and a strange and touching scene took place between them. It is difficult to

realize it fully. We have constantly to remind ourselves of the grandeur and wealth of Pharaoh ; that he was practically the monarch of the world ; that in his own eyes and in those of his people he was a semi-god, brought up on the knees of the gods, nurtured at the breasts of the gods ; and yet when he meets Jacob, an old man and weary, a wanderer, a dweller in tents, who has been betrayed, evil entreated by his sons, and who is now a famine-stricken suppliant seeking relief, it is Pharaoh who bends before Jacob, Pharaoh who is blessed, and Jacob who blesses. And yet, without contradiction, "The less is blessed of the greater." What is the explanation ? There might be something in Jacob's age, but probably far more in Pharaoh's recognition that he, like Joseph, belonged to and was the servant of that great unknown God from whom so much wisdom and grace had been given to Joseph. Pharaoh seems to have been a great monarch, able to select right men for his government, and to trust them with wealth and power, and to give privileges which could not have been granted by a smaller or less capable nature. He is the representative of the kingdoms of this world, their intellect and their power ; Jacob is the representative of the spiritual kingdoms of the world ; he is a Prince who has met and spoken with God.

The Retrospect of Life.

Pharaoh greets Jacob with the usual Eastern salutation, "How old art thou?" and Jacob, probably wearied with his long journey, and agitated with the unaccustomed surroundings in which he finds himself, gives that sorrowful retrospect of his life which is so often quoted. He answers that few and evil have been the days of his life. Abraham had lived to be 175 years old, Isaac 180, and Jacob is only 149 years old. Evil also because of the countless calamities that had overtaken him, the persecution of Esau, the injustice of Laban, his lameness after wrestling with the angel, the death of Rachel, the loss of Joseph, the sin of his sons, and the imprisonment of Simeon. Evil also, if with that same lightning glance of retrospection Jacob had seen that almost every calamity which had

come upon him had been either the direct or indirect result of his own wrong-doing and deceit. What a contrast also to the life of his brother Esau ! Esau had risen in wealth and power, for we read long lists of the names of his sons who are called dukes and rulers. Yet, despite all the sorrow and sin, there was something in Jacob which raised him far above Esau as well as far above Pharaoh. The God of Israel was his chosen God, who had revealed Himself to Jacob, and who had given him power to rise above his character so that he could be called "A Prince of God."

Jacob did not always view his life so sadly. When he was drawing nearer his final departure, when the light was almost breaking through from the courts of Heaven, and he was surrounded by the splendour of the Egyptian court, this thought of the love of God, which despite all had preserved and kept him, transformed the whole retrospect of his life. In the next chapter we find him saying, "The God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the angel which redeemed me from evil."

The truth is our lives look grey and dark when we see them with the thought of the troubles that have come upon them either through our own sins or through the sins of others. They look bright with sunshine when viewed in the light of God's overruling love and guidance.

The Continuance of the Famine in Egypt.

The days of famine had still to be passed through. Jacob and his sons were safe, for they were in the land of Goshen, or as it is called here, the land of Raamses, after the names of the great cities of Pithom and Raamses, then small cities, afterwards rebuilt into very great ones by the forced labour of the Israelites. But Joseph had the hard task of preserving Egypt, and at the same time of turning the calamity to the ultimate good of the kingdom. In such a land as Egypt, subject to sudden famine and dangers of all kinds, it is of the first importance that the central power should be in the hand of the king ; that he should have the right of taxation in order to enable him to provide against

famine and war ; and therefore Joseph bought up first all the possessions of the Egyptians, then their land, and lastly their very persons, releasing them afterwards on condition that they gave a fifth of their produce to Pharaoh. This was a very moderate taxation, and could easily be borne during the years of plenty, and it was for the ultimate good of the nation. It was a great and statesmanlike movement, and gave to Egypt that unity which is the secret of the strength of all great nations. There was a similar unity in the land of Israel. When the Israelites became the bond-servants of God after they had been saved from the destroying angel which went through the land of Egypt, the first-born in every household belonged to God, until later the ordinance was changed, and the whole tribe of Levi were consecrated to stand apart, a spiritual tribe, in place of the first-born. From that day Israel was one central power, bound to give certain tithes, and, still more, bound to obey certain great moral laws. So, too, England, by the conquest of one king and the establishment of a great central authority, became bound in feudal attachment, all land, even all persons, being held in fief from the king. Some have condemned this action of Joseph, but others find in it the root of the greatness of Egypt as a nation. The priests were exempted, this freedom from taxation probably coming not from Joseph but from Pharaoh, because the priests in Eastern lands were usually under the special protection of the king.

Approaching Death of Jacob.

Meantime seventeen years passed, and the time drew near when Jacob must die. It is rarely that death-bed scenes are recorded in the Bible, but three are given here, showing that there was something very memorable in the passing away of Jacob. The first summons which he sent was to Joseph. As he lay in the weakness and weariness of old age, he had probably been dwelling greatly upon the thought of the future of his race, and upon the promises of God to him. When speaking to Pharaoh, he had described his life as a pilgrimage ; now he was longing that his body might go back to the land of his pilgrimage, and rest there

beside Abraham and Isaac, waiting for the fulfilment of God's promise to him and to his race. Therefore he prayed Joseph to give him a pledge that he should be buried in Canaan, and by a most solemn oath Joseph promised that it should be so. He wanted to realize his prayer at Bethel, and again at the last to go to his father's house in peace. There is something very beautiful in the last days of Jacob. The light of Heaven seemed to rest upon him and to inspire his words, as it had rested upon him at the commencement of his journey at the foot of the ladder in his vision.

The Blessing of Manasseh and Ephraim.

Joseph enjoyed the utmost wealth, power and dignity in the land of Egypt, and his sons were Egyptians on their mother's side and direct descendants of the royal priesthood at On. What choice would Joseph make for them? Would he wish them to inherit the wealth and power which would naturally be theirs if they identified themselves with the Egyptians, or did he wish them to make the choice for duty and for God which he had himself made years ago, and to which he had remained faithful? We find that he determined that his sons should be Hebrews, and as a sign of this he brought them to Jacob to receive the blessing which would number them among his brethren and not among the Egyptians. It is said to be harder for a man to give up wealth for his children than for himself, that he will be tempted to do wrong in order to secure power or place for them even when he has strength to turn away from temptation for himself.

The Blessing given by Jacob.

Jacob recalls God's appearance to him and His promise, and tells Joseph that the birthright which should have been Reuben's or Simeon's is to be his. The eldest son ought to have a double blessing, so Joseph has a blessing for Manasseh and for Ephraim. They are to be put among the twelve sons of Jacob and to have the same rights as Joseph's brethren. Then comes a touching pause in which

Jacob recalls the chief reason why Joseph's children are thus accepted by him. He speaks of Rachel and her death in a way which shows that it was an ever-present sorrow to him, that nothing either in the past or present, save perhaps the wondrous vision at Bethel, was with him in so constant a manner, as that, the greatest loss of his life. Then when the two lads kneel before him, he kisses them and embraces them. He had thought never to see Joseph's face again. God has given him more than this and had let him see his children also.

Then guided by the hand of God he places his right hand on Ephraim's head and his left upon Manasseh's and gives a most exquisite blessing to them and to their father. Almost in the presence of God, his life lies before him illuminated by that presence, he sees God everywhere and in everything, and what he asks for, for these two children of his most beloved Joseph, is not the wealth for which he himself had so earnestly striven as a young man, but the illuminating guidance, care and redeeming power of the angel of God. He prays that they may be in the true lineage and faith of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and that they may grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth. This last scene seems like a glorious sunset illuminating the sky after a very dark and stormy day.

The Close of Jacob's Life.

Jacob's last words have a beauty and radiance upon them, contrasting strangely with the few and evil days of his past life. Joseph, knowing that his father's eyes were dim and his strength almost spent, imagined that by mistake he had put his right hand upon the younger son, but Jacob checks him, and tells him that it is God who is directing him in these words which he is speaking, and that it is God Himself who wills that he should give the first blessing to the younger son, and he repeats and enforces this preference of the younger. His affection for Joseph cannot make him swerve from the will of God in this matter. Then turning to Joseph, he gives him also a blessing, the assurance of God's presence

and final bringing back of the race, and he gives to him in anticipation of that time the land which he had bought at Shechem, and which his children should afterwards rescue from the Amorites by their sword and by their bow.

The whole scene is wonderfully vivid. One seems to see the old man, almost spent, and unconscious of earthly things, strengthen himself in order to give these words of blessing. He might be at the point of death as far as his physical powers were concerned, but his faith, his love for God, his love for Joseph, and his foresight and illumination, through the spirit of God, increased and strengthened according as his earthly power decayed.

LESSON XXV.

GENESIS XLIX.

THE FUTURE OF THE TWELVE TRIBES.

As Jacob drew nearer and nearer to death, his thought turned back to Canaan, and he had the most intense faith in the return of his sons one day to the promised land, and in their future occupation of the country. And yet, to human eyes at this time it seemed to be very improbable. Why should the Israelites after they had once settled down in one of the most fertile parts of a very prosperous country like Egypt, and had enjoyed the royal favour and special privileges, wish to come out of it? Even if they wished to do so, how could they? Every year their numbers would increase, their flocks and herds would be greater, and the prospect of migration would seem more difficult, as well as more unattractive. How could they conquer the land of Canaan? They were only a shepherd people and Canaan was in the possession of warlike races with cities walled up to Heaven. Surely, the part of wisdom would be to stay where they were in peace and safety, with prosperity around them. But if, on the other hand, they lost the royal favour and were unjustly treated, what chance had they of escaping? The Pharaohs were always in need of forced labour, nothing would be simpler than to oppress them and to keep them as slaves.

But Jacob, as he lay dying, saw the future in a vision, and knew that it was immutable and would be fulfilled. It was according to this vision that he had given the

blessing to Manasseh and Ephraim, and was about to give a final blessing intermingled with prophecy to his sons.

This prophecy of Jacob's shows deep spiritual insight, and, as we read it, we cannot help wondering how when he was at the point of death he could have so keen a sense of the future. And yet, Jacob's is not a solitary instance of this kind. One of the strong proofs of our immortality is that the spiritual life of a Christian grows stronger with advancing years. The life of the body decays and death comes naturally to it, for it is at its lowest, but why should the spiritual life be extinguished by death when it is at its fullest and brightest?

Jacob sees the past, present and the future, and sees it partly with the light of earth, partly with the light of Heaven. Thus he foretells the future of his sons and of their descendants, from his knowledge of their characters, and from the vision of their future which has been unrolled before him by God.

Prophecy is the translation of the present into the future, the blending of the two into one. Prophecy has been called a picture without perspective, that is to say, one in which there are no time limits; past, present and future are blended together, and as each century advances and the events foretold take place, the perspective rights itself, and we interpret the meaning of the whole.

The Meeting of the Brothers before Jacob.

It is rarely that twelve brothers stand united at their father's death-bed, especially if, as in the present case, that life has been a long one. Some of the brothers have usually been called away by death, others have been scattered far and wide, according to their life work. But here the twelve brothers stand together, and as they do so, what strange thoughts, what sorrow, what remorse, must have been present with them. For it was at a moment like this that the past would unroll itself, and with a bird's-eye view they would see over again their deception of their father, their cruelty to him; their jealousies; their cruelty to one another; all must have risen up written in dark

hard lines before them, and as they waited for his words, how intense the feeling must have been. When a will is read, there is a strange feeling of irrevocability about it. Nothing we can do or say can alter the feelings of the man who has written that will, and has put his last expression of his feelings into it. He has made his estimate of us, and he speaks to us for the last time. From the disposition of his property we can tell what his estimate of us has been. But no matter how unfavourable that estimate may be, there are two facts connected with it which can always be taken into account. In the first place, it is only that one man's opinion, that one man's estimate of our character, and his estimate may have been biassed by jealousy, hatred and prejudice. Again, our lives are still our own. He may or may not have left us his property, but the future is before us, and we can make of it what we will.

But in this prophecy of Jacob's, there is something far more terrible, more far-reaching than this. For Jacob estimates his sons not merely according to what has so far passed in their lives, but according to what he knows of their characters, and according to the effect which he believes their characters will have upon the future lives not only of themselves but also of their children. If this were a matter of Jacob's judgment alone, it would not be so irrevocable, but they knew that he was speaking under the guidance of the Spirit of God. It is a vision of the future of the tribes, only too true, as we see how it was fulfilled in Old Testament history. Each man's sin is of great moment, not only because of the sin itself, but because it is a sign of the sickness that pervades his whole body. On the other hand, those who, like Judah and Joseph, have already excelled, will go forward and will prevail, because they have already learnt the secret of eternal strength.

The Judgment of the Brothers.

Reuben.—Reuben had an excellency of dignity and power, that is to say, all the natural advantages possible together with the right of the first-born. And yet, all this

was of no avail, because of his natural weakness. His doom is in himself; "unstable as water, he cannot excel." He yields to impulse at the temptation of the moment, and is governed by his feelings and desires. There is no strength of self-conquest in him, no mastery or power. His character is like that of Passion in the Interpreter's house. This is confirmed by what we know of his intercourse with his brothers. He had no influence over them. The only suggestion that he made to them at the time when Joseph was put in the pit was disregarded by them. Unable to control himself, how could he control his brothers? Pleasure was the first thing in his life, duty second. Thus being double-minded, he was unstable in all his ways, and the same characteristic came out in his descendants. The Reubenites would not wait until they got into the promised land. They wanted immediate possession and ease, and, therefore, they asked for the land east of the Jordan, and thus always stood apart from and outside the kingdom of Israel. See also their refusal to help—Judges v. 15.

Simeon and Levi.—Simeon and Levi also carry their own judgment within themselves. Cruelty and wrath have made their habitation within them. They have massacred the Shechemites most cruelly. They cannot be given inheritance among their brethren. The tribe of Simeon had land allotted to them, but his tribe rapidly decreased in numbers and in power, so that even by the time of the second numbering of the Israelites, they were the smallest of the Children of Israel, and from that time passed out of view altogether.

The tribe of Levi is given no land at all, but scattered up and down among his brethren. Yet out of the punishment a glorious future comes, for the Levites were allowed to be the ministers of God, and to teach religion and the fear of God throughout the nation. The judgment of God was thus mercifully, in the course of time, turned into a blessing for them. But they were never trusted to have land and possessions of their own, or to be a territorial power among their brethren.

Judah.—One can almost see the faces of the three elder

brothers darken as they listen to the heavy judgment that has fallen upon each in turn, and yet, what can they say? They know in themselves that every word is just. What thoughts must have passed through the minds of the brothers, each knowing the weakness of his character. Would the inmost thoughts of every heart be exposed? Had they no future before them?

Then came the blessing upon Judah. Judah had marked himself out among his brothers. He had saved the life of Joseph by suggesting that he should be sold into Egypt. He had saved the lives of Jacob and of his brothers by the wise way in which he had urged the going down into Egypt for food, and the same spirit of self-sacrifice had been shown when he offered to be surety for his brother Benjamin. This same spirit of self-sacrifice was shown again in his speech to Joseph, when he told him how both he and his brothers had repented of their sin, and would suffer death rather than betray Benjamin, or bring fresh sorrow to their father. His tribe is to be the conquering tribe; his hand on the neck of his enemies. When all the tribes of Israel had passed into captivity, the tribe of Judah prevailed, and the scattered remnants of the other tribes were more or less subject to it.

Judah is described as a lion, strong and generous, and strength and generosity were the characteristics of many of the kings of the house of Judah, especially David. The tribe is described as a lion couchant, not rampant, that is to say, with the royal characteristics for defence rather than for attack.

The tenth verse is full of prophecy. Judah, although the kingdom had passed away, was still to be the ruling tribe in Israel, holding the sceptre, and keeping the law of God until Christ or Shiloh came. The last sentence, "Unto him shall the gathering of the people be," is still to be fulfilled at the final ingathering of the Jews. Verses 11 and 12 seem to refer to the very fertile lands of Judah, the wine of Hebron, and the pasture lands of Tekoah and Carmel.

Zebulun.—Zebulun was probably naturally of a roving

disposition, and his descendants were in consequence to be merchantmen. Although the land of Zebulun did not actually touch either the Sea of Galilee, or the city of Sidon, still it was close to Sidon, for many years a maritime city of importance, and the men of Zebulun had probably much intercourse and trade with the Sidonians.

Issachar.—Issachar was content with the enjoyment of wealth or of pleasure, without ambition or high ideal. He was an ass between two burdens, that is to say, his tribe would be a prey to their more warlike neighbours. This characteristic of indolence seems to have remained in the tribe, for in Deborah's speech, when the various tribes were being enumerated, and the help which they gave recounted, it is said that "even Issachar helped." This shows how unusual it was for the men of that tribe to arouse themselves for the general good.

Dan.—The prophecy here seems to refer to the time of the Judges, some of whom came from the tribe of Dan, especially Samson. Their land was on the border line between Israel and the Philistines, and, by their crafty devices, they kept off enemies from the country, and were like an adder in the path.

"I have waited for Thy Salvation, O Lord."

This ejaculation comes in strangely here. It seems almost as if Jacob, exhausted by speaking, had fallen back momentarily with this cry upon his lips, a cry showing the underlying yearning of his soul towards God.

Gad.—The prophecy about Gad, translated literally, contains a play upon the name Gad, or Troop: "A troop shall troop upon him, but he shall troop upon their heels," probably meaning that they were a warlike race, of whom others had better take heed.

Asher.—This prophecy contains a reference to the wealthy district in Palestine which would one day be the portion of the tribe.

Naphtali.—Naphtali has been said to be a northern mountaineer, dwelling upon the high places of the field,

and the prophecy refers to the ability, quickness, and ready speech of the men of Naphtali.

Joseph.—Here the whole soul of Jacob pours itself out. He first gives the secret of Joseph's strength, and uses the metaphor of the well of life. Joseph was filled with the spirit of God. From his boyhood up he had lived in the near presence of God; hence his fruitfulness. Following this comes the allusion to the cruelty of his brothers in words which must have been terrible for them to hear. The archers shot at him, seeking his destruction, but the bow of Joseph had a strength above theirs, because not his own. Compare "Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands." There the dying man gave strength to the young king; here the invisible Almighty God put His hands of strength and power upon the hand of Joseph, and upheld him in each action of his life.

From this tribe is the shepherd, possibly Joseph; the stone or foundation, possibly Joshua. Then comes the outcome of the fulness of Jacob's love, to come upon the head of him who, because of his righteous actions, was separated from his father and his brethren. It is part of the Christian law to be separate. "Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing." But, together with the separation, comes the nearness of God and the fulness of the blessing of God.

Benjamin.—Benjamin is compared to a wolf. His characteristics are very different from those of the lion of Judah. He ravins for prey. A good illustration is found in the character of Saul, who, when king, ravined for himself, and not for his people. The men of Benjamin seem always to have been warlike and adventurous. Compare the 700 left-handed archers who at one time were so great a power in the land.

Jacob's words ended, and a hush of stillness must have fallen upon the twelve brothers as they saw themselves and their characters in the light of the revelation given by Jacob; and, if they were capable of feeling it, there must have been also an awe and a stillness at the thought that the sins in which they had indulged, and the characteristics

which had gradually grown up and grown stronger in them, would determine not only their own lot and fate, but would determine also the characteristics of their descendants for ever.

Lastly, Jacob bade his sons bury him with Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac. This done, he calmly laid himself down, and was gathered unto his people.

LESSON XXVI.

GENESIS L.

THE DEATH OF JOSEPH.

WHEN Jacob died Joseph fell upon his breast, and wept upon him and kissed him. The love between them had been one passing the love between father and son. Both men were capable of an unusual intensity of affection, because their characters were deeper and greater than those of ordinary men.

Every honour which Joseph could render to his father was immediately done. We notice that the physicians embalmed him, and not the professional embalmers, probably because the latter embalmed only the Egyptians, and Jacob was an Israelite. Ten days were set apart for mourning for Jacob ; that is to say, there was a royal mourning for him. Though he was only a wanderer in the land, yet, as the father of Joseph, he was held in royal esteem.

Joseph could not himself go in to see Pharaoh, as he was mourning, and therefore probably unshaven, and unclean to the Egyptians. But his request was granted, and more than his request, for the whole aristocracy of Egypt, an aristocracy reckoned the most exclusive that the world has ever known, went up with Joseph and his brethren to bury Jacob. It was strange indeed that this great ancestor of the Jewish race should have been officially mourned by the representatives of the ruling nation of the world ; and it is a beautiful touch that the royal mourners stopped short at Abel-Mizraim, and that his sons only carried him into the land

of Canaan, and stood round that cave of their ancestors which was the pledge of their future possession of the country.

Few and evil had been the days of Jacob's life as compared with the life of Esau; but he had kept true to the faith of his fathers, and he was gathered to his own people, to await there the realization of the promises which by faith had become his own.

The Return of the Brothers to Egypt.

In this scene the generosity and greatness of Joseph's character find expression. His brothers had probably never realized the depth of Joseph's affection for his father until they saw his intense grief for him when he was dead. As they looked at their own past conduct to Joseph, they judged him according to the smallness of their own natures, and thought he would now turn against them and oppress them. What if Joseph had cared for them and sheltered them so far merely out of affection for Jacob? What would they do now that they were powerless in his hand? So they sent to him a message which may or may not have been true, saying that before his death their father had prayed that he would forgive their sin. They did not even go themselves into his presence, nor send Judah or Benjamin. Little wonder that Joseph wept. Had his father also misread his character and doubted his nature, or was it that they were incapable of realizing the kindness of his thought and good-will towards them? When they were gathered together in his presence he dealt firmly, yet gently, with them. He lifted the whole question out of the atmosphere of personal wrong and personal revenge into the higher atmosphere in which his life, character, and thought lived and moved. In the first place he could not punish them, for he was not in the place of God. More important than the question of the sin between two men is the sin which lies between those men and God. When injustice is done, it is not the wronged man who is so much injured as God, whose law is broken. Therefore, whatever their sin has been, Joseph leaves it between themselves and

God. Then he touched the whole question firmly. There was no question that they have done evil to him, but God had overruled it to save much people alive. Therefore, as far as Joseph was concerned, he was willing to look only at the overruling hand of God, and not at their action, and therefore they could trust him.

We wonder at the slowness of heart of Joseph's brethren. Why could they not, why did they not trust him? And yet, how many of us will here see the reflection of the slowness of our own hearts in believing and trusting in the goodness and the love of God and of Christ. Over and over again we distrust God's forgiveness; we read and we measure His mercy according to the poorness of our own character. We know our own instability, we cannot rest upon nor realize the rock of our salvation, and we know not how we grieve the Holy Spirit of God by this coldness of our unbelief.

The Last Days of Joseph.

Joseph kept his word and protected them. He dwelt in Egypt, and so did his descendants and those of his brethren. He lived for 110 years, and the last glimpse that we get of him is given in his home life, and not in his life as a statesman, for the one fact that is recorded of him is that he saw his grandchildren, and that they were personally cherished by him. We thus get a beautiful picture of the last days of Joseph. He was probably one of the greatest, if not the greatest statesman that has ever lived; he was also one of the greatest benefactors of his age, and yet his greatness and benevolence of mind finds its chief light and joy in his old age in the cherishing and nourishing of the little children around him.

Then when his turn has come to die he gathers his children around him for the last time. Statesman and benefactor as he was, many sad thoughts must have filled his mind, for he must have seen the future lowering darkly upon his race, and known that they were in the power of the Pharaohs. Who would protect them when he was gone? That was their first danger. Their second and

even greater danger lay in themselves, because they were growing wealthy and living in ease, and multiplying rapidly. Who could induce them to be true to the pledge that God had made with them, and with their fathers, to leave the land of Egypt and to go back to Canaan, a land in itself no wealthier than, if as wealthy as the land of Egypt, and filled with enemies, whom their life of ease in Egypt would totally have unfitted them to overcome. Yet Joseph, like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, knew not the impossible. The ring of his faith is clear: "God will surely visit you and bring you out of this land into the land which He sware to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

A Waiting Witness.

Again Joseph reiterated his faith in the promise of God that they would return to Canaan, and as a pledge of it he bids them carry up his bones with them when they go. His children must have wondered why he was not carried up at once and buried with a royal burial, such as had been given to his father; or why he was not buried in Egypt. Why should not one so honoured and beloved, one who belonged to the royal family, be buried like the kings of Egypt, in one of the pyramids which they saw everywhere around them? But the grandeur of Joseph's character came out in the very simplicity of his burial. He made no provision for any honour being paid to him either in Canaan or in Egypt. With the same statesmanlike fortitude which he had shown throughout his life, he provided for what was best for his descendants in his burial and his death. He had saved his people when living, he would save them and be a living power among them, even after he was dead. Throughout the long three hundred years that would elapse before they returned, his embalmed body would stand in a coffin in Egypt as a witness to each generation. If the successive Pharaohs, as was most probable, oppressed the Children of Israel, then that waiting coffin would be a pledge to the downtrodden people of redemption, and of a free land which would one day be theirs. If, on the other hand, they settled down into enjoyment and forgetfulness, and wanted

nothing beyond Egypt, then his waiting body would testify that this was not their rest. It would warn them to lift up their eyes, and to remember either in their prosperity or in their bondage that one day the signal would come for them to depart and go forward into their new inheritance. If they questioned whether any messenger sent from God was right when he bade them arise and go, then more powerful than his living voice would be the silent witness of Joseph calling them also to go forward. His coffin waited there, a pledge of their future possession, the token of innumerable promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

A Life of Responsibility.

The summing up of Joseph's life lay in his putting aside of self. From boyhood up he did his duty wherever he was, his service to his employer, his service to all around him, whether they had any claim upon him or not, indeed his hand was as liberal to those who had wronged him as to his friends. This sense of responsibility, this greatness and goodwill to men, were the ruling passions of his life. Though he lived among the Egyptians he was always free from their materialism, he cared nothing for their pomp and show, his brethren were his brethren, his father his father. He might be the governor of Egypt, and set on high because of his office, yet his eye was searching for, and his heart thinking of his brethren. He fell upon their necks, he kissed them, he owned them, in the face of the whole Egyptian court. At his death, although he had lived the greater part of his life in Egypt, and had married into the nobility of Egypt, he wanted nothing of the pomp and show of burial which was so much valued among them. The coffin in Egypt waiting the promise made by God to His people was, in the simplicity, pathos, and unselfishness, of which it was the emblem, far grander than the pyramid of any king of Egypt.

The Waiting Witness of To-Day.

Joseph may have known the value of his life, and of his work for his father, and for his brethren, and for the land of Egypt, but he did not know the value of the service

which he had rendered to after ages from the example of his obedience to the spirit of God within him. He was allowed to show forth some of the most beautiful characteristics of Christ's life, and to reflect them in a form which has inspired men from that day until now. The coffin waiting in Egypt is like the empty tomb of Christ. As the coffin showed that one day the Children of Israel would arise and go into the land of Canaan, so the tomb standing open because Christ has burst the gates of death, witnesses to our future resurrection ; and when our faith wavers, and the time seems long, we can remember that the darkness we are passing through is nothing compared with the darkness of those 400 years in the land of Egypt. The coffin of Joseph, despite the nobility of which it was a token, was a faint ray of hope compared with the glorious light radiating from the empty tomb of Jesus. If the Israelites could rejoice when they saw the waiting body of Joseph, how much more can we rejoice at the thought of our risen Lord, who is waiting for us at the right hand of God, and is bidding us lift up our heads for our redemption draweth nigh.